



魔王凱旋

精霊使の 剣舞 16

ブレイドダンス

志瑞祐

Illustration

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キャラクター原案

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「お前たちか、この俺を
千年の眠りから覚ましたのは——」

燃えさかる紅蓮の炎の中から、
「魔王」が姿を現した。
その足もとに侍るのは、
美しい四人の姫たちだ。



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Prologue

"—Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

White and black. The blades of the dual swords crossed.

Absolute Blade Arts, Dual Wielding Form — Purple Lightning Revised.

This was a skill originating from Purple Lightning, a thrust executed with godlike speed, modifying it for dual wielding.

Rinnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnng!

A crisp sound resembling the breaking of glass was heard —

The demon sword of darkness and the sacred sword of steel had shattered the witch's crimson demon sword.

In that instant, surprise appeared in those gray eyes of Greyworth's.

Kamito did not miss that look in her eyes. So even the strongest elemental on the continent would show this kind of expression for once? This thought flashed through his mind momentarily.

The elemental waffen held in his hands were stronger than Greyworth's —

During this moment, Kamito had surpassed his mentor for the very first time.

Kamito felt like he saw a faint smile on the corners of Greyworth's lips.

However, it could have been his imagination.

A momentary clash of blades. Kamito's use of the Absolute Blade Arts had shattered the demon sword. The residual force easily sent Greyworth flying.

Behind her was a cliff leading to the gaping jaws of Dragon's Canyon.

Thus, she fell towards the bottom of the abyss and was gradually swallowed by the darkness of the night.

It felt as though this was going according to her intention —

"Greyworth!"

Kamito could not help but cry out loudly.

Chapter 1 - Sealed Memories

Part 1

O exalted Dragon King ruling over the skies —

Please embrace the souls of your warriors so that they may rest in peace —

Inside the grand temple of Dragon Rock Fortress, commonly known as the Stronghold, the prayers of dragon princess maidens echoed.

The princess maidens were mourning the dragons that had died in defense of the fortress, holding funeral rites for their remains.

The ceremony looked like it was going to last the entire night. Kamito got up, took a deep bow towards the altar, then left the grand temple.

He walked silently through the dim corridors that were built from rock.

The fortress currently felt very desolate.

There had been so many female attendants during the daytime but none of them could be found now.

Confronting Greyworth on her own, Leonora had been heavily injured and sent to treatment. Although her life was not in peril at the moment, ordinary healing magic seemed ineffective for the wounds inflicted by Greyworth's demon sword. Apparently, surgery had to be performed by an advanced specialized physician.

(Greyworth...)

Kamito clenched his fist while walking.

In that final instant —

She should have been able to stop herself from falling.

But back then, she had chosen on her own to fall to the bottom of the canyon.

The Knights of the Dragon Emperor were currently searching for the whereabouts of the fallen Greyworth.

On further thought, that Dusk Witch could not possibly have died simply from falling off a cliff—

Just then, a girl suddenly emerged from a dark corner in the corridor, accompanied by a flutter of her dress of darkness and the mild sway of her black hair that seemed to meld with the color of the night.

"What's with the pensive frown, Kamito?"

Saying that, the darkness spirit girl—Restia—smiled faintly.

"Restia, you—"

Saying that, Kamito stopped walking.

Restia approached him.

"Let's go to your room. We can talk at length out of earshot."

Standing on tiptoe, she murmured into Kamito's ear.

"...Yeah, you're right."

Kamito nodded and resumed walking.

Part 2

After taking Restia back to his room, Kamito placed the Demon Slayer against the wall by the bed. After all, the battle against Greyworth had been considerably draining. Whenever in such a state, Est probably was not

going to wake up unless Kamito poured a great deal of divine power into her.

Kamito sat down on the bed. Restia quietly took a seat beside him.

"..."

For a while, Kamito remained silent.

...There was a mountain of questions he wanted to ask her. Why had she been teleported to the mortal realm in the form of a human girl? What had happened to her during her memory loss...?

However, Kamito had difficulty finding the right words.

Of course, he was sincerely happy that she had recovered her memory.

That being said, having lived with the timid version of Restia for some time now, he found himself a bit at a loss how to interact with her original self.

Did she read Kamito's mind?

"What's the matter, Kamito?"

Her dusk-colored eyes were gazing at Kamito slightly mischievously.

Kamito felt his heart skip a beat.

"Umm, you saved me back there."

Kamito spoke while averting eye contact.

"Yes, I am glad I made it in time. After all, it would still be too much of a stretch to take on the Dusk Witch in her prime even for you and Miss Sword Spirit."

(...Definitely, without Restia's power, I would've been killed for sure.)

Sighing lightly, Kamito stared straight at his hands.

Defeating Greyworth in her prime relied entirely on the gap in the power level of the spirits. The demon spirit named Vlad Dracul was undoubtedly an extremely powerful spirit, but could not be compared to the likes of the legendary Est and Restia, after all. Had Greyworth been using her original spirit, it would be highly uncertain whether Kamito could win even when dual wielding—

"I suppose I have the Dragon King to thank for restoring my memory too."

"Yeah, we owe her a huge favor."

Kamito nodded and concurred.

Dracunia's Bahamut was the Dragon King, whose mighty fame reached far and wide across the continent.

Her true identity was a legendary-class dragon spirit with the appearance of a lovely young girl.

In the past, Bahamut had been the trusted subordinate of Ren Ashdoll, the Darkness Elemental Lord. Feeling an obligation towards her former master's charge, Bahamut had helped Restia recover her memory and lent them her aid.

"Actually, the favor has been repaid already."

"Huh?"

"—While you were fighting the witch, a great deal happened here too."

Saying that, Restia told Kamito about what had happened when she had regained her memory.

Inside the Dragon King's throne room, the Holy Kingdom's cardinal, Millennia Sanctus, had shown up.

Then she had released Otherworldly Darkness, almost corrupting the Dragon King—

"...So Greyworth's invasion was just a diversion?"

Kamito commented lightly.

Who could have thought that something like this happened inside the fortress while Kamito was fighting—

If Restia had not woken up in time, the Dragon King would have been tainted by the Otherworldly Darkness like the Elemental Lords, with irrevocably bad consequences.

"Come to think of it, there's more to that Millennia than being just a cardinal. To think that the Otherworldly Darkness resides in her—"

In a rare display, Restia murmured with a solemn expression.

"Yeah, that girl is full of mysteries."

The Otherworldly Darkness was capable of driving even Elemental Lords insane, yet she was able to store it in her right eye. Greyworth's transformation was probably her handiwork too.

How did she manage to retain her sanity?

(Or perhaps, she had gone mad long ago...)

Silence descended.

Tick-tock, tick-tock... Inside the quiet room, only the sound of the clock was heard.

Kamito coughed lightly.

"So, next..."

He asked in a grave tone of voice.

"Back then, why weren't you destroyed?"

"..."

—Back then.

In front of the Elemental Lord's altar, Restia was definitely supposed to have been destroyed.

By his own very hand, Kamito had pierced her in the chest.

In spite of that, she still survived.

Deep in a Laurenfrost forest, she had turned into a human girl's form —

"Yes indeed —"

Restia nodded and gazed into Kamito's eyes.

"Let me tell you. What happened to me on that day —"

Part 3

—*That day.*

Only the victorious team in the Blade Dance tournament were allowed to have an audience with the Elemental Lords at their altar —

Kamito and his team had tried to liberate the Fire Elemental Lord from the Otherworldly Darkness' corruption.

However, standing in front of the throne with complicated feelings, Kamito was just about to swing the Demon Slayer when...

His mind was suddenly controlled by *her voice*, that belonging to Darkness Elemental Lord Ren Ashdoll.

—O Demon King, go on and release the true darkness upon this world.

Against that sweet voice, which seemed to devour his mind, Kamito struggled desperately but to little effect. He was instantly swallowed by the darkness surging from the throne, rendering him unconscious directly.

Then amid that darkness—

Kamito saw a terrifying scene.

It seemed to be buried in endless darkness—

An army of glowing angels, thousands, tens of thousands strong.

—If those beings showed up at Astral Zero, the world would come to an end.

That was what Kamito had thought instinctively. In the next instant, the darkness occupying his view dissipated. By the time he realized, Kamito saw that the Demon Slayer held in his hand had pierced the throne.

Smiling while holding Kamito in her embrace, Restia had been pierced by the same thrust too.

—Before her will devours me, Kamito, please kill me.

Restia spoke with a peaceful expression on her face.

Once Ren Ashdoll's will, contaminated by the Otherworldly Darkness, swallowed Restia, it would use her as the medium to take control of Kamito's mind. Hence, Restia intended to sacrifice herself so as to protect Kamito from being swallowed by darkness.

Kamito's contracted spirit, Restia Ashdoll, would then disappear while her powers would be inherited by his other contracted spirit, Est, turning her into the Demon King's Sword.

—That was what was supposed to happen.

This was all Kamito could remember. A week had elapsed by the time he woke up again after that, on a bed in Areishia Spirit Academy.

"—Back then, I had resolved in my heart to be destroyed together with Ren Ashdoll's will."

Restia murmured.

"However, you were not destroyed—"

"I was not."

Restia nodded gently.

Back then, with the Demon Slayer skewering her in the chest, Restia would have been destroyed no matter how one thought about it. Precisely because of that, Kamito took such a heavy blow that he lost all memories about her.

"Just as my existence was about to vanish, a certain spell activated."

"Spell?"

"Yes, presumably a spell set up by my creator, the Darkness Elemental Lord. When my life was in danger, my attributes as a spirit were sealed away, then I was reborn in the human realm. This probably belongs to the same type of magic as what she used to transfer her powers to the Demon Kings—"

So Ren Ashdoll had enchanted Restia with a spell, huh?

Even unaware of it herself, Restia had been reborn in the human realm because of this magic.

When Kamito woke up at the Academy, the spirit seal on his left hand had vanished, probably because her powers as a spirit had been sealed temporarily.

"...I see, so that's why."

Darkness Elemental Lord Ren Ashdoll must have foreseen that Restia would encounter a crisis of this sort and planted this rebirth magic in her. But truly ironically, to think that this crisis was caused by Ren Ashdoll herself...

"Anyway, thank goodness."

Kamito remarked poignantly.

Due to Restia being reborn in the human realm, she had been liberated from the crisis of being corrupted by Otherworldly Darkness. Her lost memories had also been restored with Dragon King Bahamut's help.

"I agree, but—"

Restia continued.

"Kamito, what came after that is the important part."

"...Huh?"

Kamito could not help but frown in response to what Restia said.

"What do you mean by that?"

"..."

In a rare moment, Restia's eyes seemed to waver—

Then with firm determination, she began to speak.

"...After disappearing from the altar of the Elemental Lords, my consciousness woke up inside darkness that stretched endlessly."

"Inside darkness...?"

Kamito could not help but react to a start.

"Don't tell me this is —"

"Indeed, it is the same dream as the one we dreamed together —"

For the past few days, Kamito had dreamed several times, seeing Restia curled up in the dark, waiting for him in the hollow darkness.

"After being reborn, I was imprisoned there, in that dark dimension, a manifestation of my consciousness. Then there, I noticed the presence of something —"

"Something?"

Kamito could not help but ask, and Restia nodded.

"Yes, something sealed inside of me, a black box containing a vast quantity of memories —"

"A black box..."

"Indeed, in the abyss of the dark dimension manifested from my consciousness, there exists something dark, even darker than darkness. A vast quantity of memories sealed there without my knowledge. Then when I made contact with it, a portion of the memories flowed into my mind —"

She must be recalling what happened at the time —

Kamito did not miss Restia's mild trembling.

"Kamito, I—"

She spoke quietly.

"I was a spirit created using that Otherworldly Darkness."

"...Huh?"

The meaning of Restia's words—

Kamito was unable to comprehend immediately.

(Restia is a spirit created using the Otherworldly Darkness?)

Kamito gulped and looked at her face. Unlike usual, in a rare display, her dusk-colored eyes were slightly wavering with slight unease.

"...What on earth is up with that?"

Finally, Kamito inquired.

"Exactly what the words imply—No, perhaps saying I was created using the Otherworldly Darkness would not be entirely accurate."

Restia shook her head and spoke.

"Elements from Astral Zero form the majority of my composition, the same as for other darkness spirits. However, the root of my existence, what constitutes my core, is the Otherworldly Darkness that caused those Elemental Lords to go insane. It is buried deep inside of me—"

Restia touched her own chest with her fingertips and smiled with self-deprecation.

"Why would that kind of thing be—"

Stunned, Kamito muttered subconsciously.

"...That, I myself have no idea either."

Restia quietly shook her head.

"I don't know if it is because I was created with Otherworldly Darkness in the first place, but I was not corrupted. I also don't know why, but that darkness definitely exists inside me. When Millennia Sanctus was trying to kill Bahamut, I was able to absorb the darkness she used because the darkness within me awakened —"

"..."

Indeed, inside the throne room, when Bahamut was in danger, Restia had absorbed Millennia's Otherworldly Darkness. Kamito had intended to ask her later about why she had been able to do that. If she had been created with Otherworldly Darkness in the first place, then it made sense.

(But, speaking of which...)

A few questions appeared in Kamito's mind.

Although she had already explained —

If that Otherworldly Darkness was buried inside Restia too, why did she not lose her sanity like the Elemental Lords? If her creator, Darkness Elemental Lord Ren Ashdoll, was the one who had buried the darkness into her, what was the reason for doing so? Why did she hide this fact from her loyal subordinate Restia...?

"Did you remember anything else?"

Kamito asked.

"Umm, when you made contact with the memories from the black box..."

"I was only able to make contact with a small part of the sealed memories. I get deflected as soon as I touch somewhere deeper."

"I see..."

A vast amount of sealed memories that even Restia herself could not access.

What on earth did all this mean—?

(In the end, I still know nothing about Restia...)

Kamito thought silently to himself.

At that moment—

"Hey, Kamito."

"...Hmm?"

"What exactly am I?"

Restia asked with uncertainty in her voice.

"...!?"

Kamito was at a loss for words.

(...Oh right. Restia herself should be the one most unsettled by this.)

The Otherworldly Darkness was capable of driving spirits into a mad frenzy. To think that something like that was inside her, along with a vast quantity of sealed memories too. Even a spirit, virtually unlimited in lifespan, would be hard pressed not to feel unsettled.

"Restia—"

Calling her name, Kamito held her hand straight away.

"...Kamito?"

"It's not important whether the Otherworldly Darkness is inside you or not. I'm really glad you came back to my side. These are the true feelings that I'm able to convey to you now."

Saying that, Kamito embraced Restia forcefully.

Feeling her delicate hair brushing against his cheek, he felt a sense of nostalgia.

Restia moaned softly and silently wrapped her arm around Kamito's back, clutching his uniform tightly with her fingers. This active affection was quite rare to see from her.

"...H-Hey, Restia?"

Her unexpected response made Kamito flush, flustering him.

"Fufu, I feel a little tired. I kind of need to sleep."

"...I-I see. Makes sense."

Kamito nervously nodded, placed his hand on her head and stroked.

...This was only natural too. Restia had fought all-out against Greyworth's demon sword too.

"To conserve energy, I need to rest for a while—"

"Yeah, I get it... Get some proper rest."

"Thank you, Kamito."

Restia smiled, apparently relieved. Turning into glowing particles, she disappeared into thin air.

Then the familiar demon sword of darkness manifested in Kamito's hand. Cradling it tenderly, Kamito placed the sword next to Est and laid himself down on the bed.

(...The Otherworldly Darkness, and sealed memories too... huh?)

Since a while ago, the Holy Kingdom had been searching for Restia obsessively. Could this be related to the Otherworldly Darkness residing within Restia...?



Many questions surfaced in his mind all at once.

However, one thing was extremely certain.

Kamito stared at the spirit seal on the back of his left hand.

(...She's finally back.)

Chapter 2 - The Darkness of Zohar

Part 1

Dawn. After a few hours of sleep, Kamito exited his room while carrying a bag of souvenirs, then made his way towards Dragon King Bahamut's throne room.

Kamito wanted to express his gratitude for the recovery of Restia's memories. More importantly, Kamito could not help but worry about her after the ordeal from Millennia's Otherworldly Darkness corrupting her.

Advancing along the corridor of rugged stone, he arrived at the throne room.

At the entrance, two guards were standing in front of the massive door. Noticing Kamito's arrival, they silently saluted him.

"I wish to pay my respects to the Dragon King."

"His Majesty has given you permission. Please enter."

Bowing his head slightly at the two guards, Kamito walked through the door.

(...It seems like she knew I'd come over.)

Due to being cursed by the Earth Elemental Lord thousands of years ago, she was confined to this fortress, unable to take a single step outside. However, she kept herself well-informed about happenings in the fortress.

As he continued along the corridor, accompanied by his own echoing footsteps, he finally reached a great hall lined with stone columns.

This was the throne room, the place from where Dragon King Bahamut of Dracunia ruled.

Kamito approached the pedestal—

"—Welcome, preordained one. O member of the habitually slothful race."

A thunderous roar, seemingly causing the ground to shake, echoed in the hall.

Kamito halted. Bright light was generated overhead, illuminating the top of the pedestal. Thick mist appeared underfoot, instantly filling the surroundings with an unpleasant atmosphere.

Behind the curtains draping down from the ceiling, a humongous silhouette came into view.

It was the shadow of a fearsome giant dragon with a pair of curving horns.

"I, king of kings and the ruler of dragonkind, have been waiting for thee—"

"...Uh, could you cut it out with the acting?"

Kamito interrupted the booming voice with eyes narrowed.

"..."

After a brief moment of silence...

"...My goodness, to think I took the trouble to prepare and all."

The curtain over the pedestal rose continuously. Dracunia's Dragon King revealed her true visage.

Sitting far back behind the curtain was not a giant dragon—

Instead, it was a young girl with a pair of bewitching eyes of red.

Glowing faintly with phosphorescence, her lustrous hair was lapis lazuli in color. Kamito could not help but feel mesmerized by her pale and slender limbs.

However, the girl featured traits that were clearly not human.

On the sides of her head was a total of two beautifully curving horns.

Indeed, the true form of the Dragon King ruling over Dracunia, a major power in the international scene, was—

This dragon spirit with the appearance of an adorable young girl.

The dragon spirit girl, Bahamut, was pouting and glaring at Kamito. She was a bit offended that her painstakingly prepared performance had been disregarded.

"...From what I can see, it looks like you're fine?"

Towards the girl before him, Kamito averted his gaze slightly and said.

This was not because of the imposing presence of the strongest dragon spirit. Instead, he was avoiding her gaze that was malicious as always.

Pale as a polished pearl, her arms and legs like exquisite sculptures.

Furthermore, there were the two gentle mounds on her chest.

Her beautiful body, seemingly the masterpiece of gods, was in Kamito's full view without reserve.

Although her breasts and lower abdomen were hidden among the branches and leaves of trees, Kamito was still quite stunned by her racy appearance.

Did she sense Kamito's response?

"Oh dear, were you worrying about me? I, the Dragon King—"

She smiled mischievously.

"Yeah, I guess so..."

"Fufu, what a lovely feeling, to have someone worry about me. It has been thousands of years since the last time."

Nothing less expected from a spirit. The Dragon King casually referenced a time scale of unimaginable magnitude. Kamito ascended the steps up to the throne and sat down on a tree next to the throne.

"...? What is with this very fragrant aroma?"

The Dragon King furrowed her brow and remarked while sniffing.

"I brought souvenirs to visit you. That being said, I'm really sorry it's only cheap stuff..."

Kamito took out a bun, unwrapped the oilpaper around it, and handed it to the Dragon King.

This was a snack he had bought at a stall he had passed by when Leonora was taking him on a tour of the city.

It consisted of minced meat and finely diced vegetables wrapped in pastry, then deep fried after sprinkling a generous helping of pepper.

According to Leonora, this was apparently the most delicious food in the entire city. Kamito had tried one at the time and indeed, it was very delicious.

"What a rare offering... Is it food?"

Looking at the bun, the Dragon King examined it with a gaze of intense curiosity.

"It's one of Dracunia's famed specialties, the deep-fried bun... Don't tell me you haven't heard of it?"

"It is my first time seeing it. One would be hard pressed to find the food of commoners appear among offerings."

"You are the king, after all. Aren't you able to get your hands on any kind of offering you want?"

"Impossible. As the king, my dignity would be utterly obliterated if I were to demand the food of commoners."

"...I see. It's tough being the king sometimes."

Kamito remarked honestly.

"Indeed. Things are already better nowadays. There were times in the past when a hundred cattle or live sacrifices of young women were offered to me. Well, I suppose I am simply getting my just deserts as the culprit for crafting the image of the ferocious Dragon King in the first place..."

"...You've got it rough."

"Indeed..."

Saying that, the Dragon King suddenly shrugged and presented her tender lips to Kamito.

"...?"

Puzzled, Kamito could not help but tilt his head.

"..."

"..."

"Well, could you hurry up and feed that to me?"

"Huh?"

"Well, my hands... are bound. Due to this infernal curse."

"O-Ohhhh, I see—"

The Dragon King's body was bound to this land because of the Earth Elemental Lord's curse. The slightest motion from her and branches would wrap around her limbs, immobilizing her.

"But if that's the case, what do you do with the offerings served by the princess maidens?"

"All this time, I simply dismiss them after sniffing their scent. Presumably, my princess maidens end up sharing my offerings among themselves."

"I see..."

True, spirits did not require food to sustain their existences. All they needed to do was replenish their spiritual energy, divine power.

Although spirits were also able to derive some energy from food, princess maidens served food to spirits as offerings only for the sake of pleasing them. For example, Est and Scarlet joined Kamito and company at meals, but for spirits, this was not essential. However, Kamito felt bad for Bahamut to have food in front of her yet be unable to eat it.

"...Fine, I get it. Umm, open your mouth."

Cough cough. Kamito spoke after coughing a little.

"Hmm, w-well, this is making me a little nervous..."

The Dragon King spoke, quite embarrassed apparently, opening her adorable lips with an "Ah."

To avoid looking at her naked body, Kamito mustered all his willpower to divert his gaze. With his fingers, he pushed the bun into those lovely lips.

"...Umph. Umph umph."

The Dragon King savored the bun carefully. Anyone watching this scene would probably have difficulty associating her with King Bahamut of Dracunia, feared by all the nations on the continent.

"Ahh, to think that such a delicacy existed in this world!"

With crumbs all over her mouth, she exclaimed with a radiant smile of happiness.

Kamito was glad that she enjoyed it.

"Hey, it's all over your mouth."

Kamito was just about to wipe the corner of her lips when...

"H-Hold it right there. What are you doing!?"

Blushing intensely, the Dragon King tried to escape.

"Be a good girl and don't move."

"...Excuse me, need I remind you that I am the Dragon King of Dracunia? As Ren Ashdoll's trusted commander, I am the strongest dragon spirit, legendary class according to the classifications of your kind—Mmph!"

"Yeah yeah, whatever..."

Kamito carefully wiped the lips of the Dragon King who kept struggling.

...The Dragon King's dignity was rendered completely moot.

"See, it's all clean now."

"Ooh, to think that you are the first one to put me, the Dragon King, in such a state of embarrassment—"

The Dragon King glared tearfully at Kamito again.

Smiling wryly, Kamito stood up.

"Well, it's time for me to head back."

"...I see. I understand."

The Dragon King spoke with a hint of loneliness. A tree branch reached for Kamito's forehead and left a small mark behind. This was Dragon's Protection for travelers, praying for safe passage, a traditional Dracunian good luck charm.

"I will pray for success in your Theocracy mission."

"Yeah, you can count on me."

Kamito nodded seriously.

The aforementioned Theocracy mission was part of Dracunia's terms for recognizing Legitimate Ordesia. This mission involved rescuing the Theocracy's second princess, Saladia Kahn, from imprisonment.

Dracunia's intention was probably to undermine Sjora's administration using Saladia as a puppet. Despite the Dragon King's appearance of a young girl, in this context, she was ruler who had governed this nation for centuries, after all.

(...The Alphas Theocracy, huh?)

This was the land that had given rise to the Instructional School, stood as the headquarters of the Demon King cult, as well as being the birthplace of the Demon King.

With his current and gradual awakening as the Demon King, Kamito felt the hand of fate in his going to the Theocracy at this point in time. He quietly clenched his fist.

Part 2

Meanwhile on Dragon's Peak on Kelbreth Mountain, Claire and her comrades were inside the temple of the dark dragon, where Rubia had previously trained, working hard to surpass their own limits.

Using an ancient device invented by the Elfim race, the girls had been transported to alternate dimensions to face their own respective trials. Right now, they kept drawing out the potential hidden within themselves.

"Let's go, Scarlet!"

"Yes, Master!"

Responding to Claire's summon, a girl wrapped in flames flew out of thin air. Moving between the trees with speed faster than the naked eye could follow, Scarlet unleashed a sweeping strike with her flaming scythe.

Foolish darkness spirits were instantly burned to ash. Over there —

"Turn in to charcoal!"

Claire's prided skill of Fireball exploded with perfect timing.

The surrounding darkness spirits were obliterated together with the trees.

Spinning in the air, Scarlet landed securely on the ground. Despite making a thumbs-up at Scarlet and showing a carefree expression, Claire exhibited clear signs of fatigue on her face.

"Huff... Huff... I knew it. Sustaining this form requires frightening amounts of divine power."

Panting, Claire sat down on the spot.

Although she had defeated the illusion of her elder sister, liberating Scarlet's true form of Ortlinde by her own will, Claire still had far to go in mastering control of the supreme flame spirit.

"...With this, I can't summon an elemental waffe either."

"With sustained training, you will surely attain complete control of me, because Master, your talent surpasses Rubia-sama's."

"Me, stronger than Nee-sama? No way, you must be kidding—"

Claire objected, shaking her head.

"Master, I chose to form a contract with you instead of choosing Rubia-sama. Please be more confident in yourself—"

Twitching her fiery ears, Scarlet encouraged Claire.

"I have been watching the whole time, even as a hell cat, watching the way you have worked hard, Master. You will definitely be fine—"

"..."

Claire stood up unsteadily.

Murmuring, she sounded like she was talking to herself.

"...That's right, I have to stand by Kamito's side—"

In other dimensions, the trio of Ellis, Rinslet and Fianna should be undergoing their own trials too. As the leader of Team Scarlet, it would be unacceptable to give up here.

"Now that is the spirit, Master!"

Scarlet nodded firmly. Although her expressionless demeanor rivaled Est's, there was definite warmth and feeling in her words.

"...Then let's keep going... Eh, hold on a sec—"

...At that moment, Claire suddenly felt concerned about something.

"...?"

"Just now, you said you were watching me the whole time... The whole time? Even at night while I'm sleeping too...?"

"Yes, Master."

Scarlet nodded.

"I-I see..."

Claire's face was flushed completely red.

"L-Let me make myself clear. Don't get the wrong idea about what I do every night before going to sleep, okay? I-It's just exercise for upping my bust size!"

"...Really? I thought you were pleasuring yourself every night while thinking of Kamito-sama—"

"...Y-You idiot! You've got it totally wrong!"

With her red hair standing on end, Claire kept hammering her fists against Scarlet's shoulder.

Part 3

The sky over the desert was currently shrouded by thick black clouds.

The Theocracy's capital of Zohar was the city that Demon King Solomon had founded a thousand years ago.

During the Demon King War, Sacred Maiden Areishia had led the Salvation Army to burn down the city, turning it into ruins. A couple centuries later, it was revived as a major metropolis, serving as a transport hub in continental trade.

At the heart of Zohar was Scorpia, the Demon Scorpion Palace where the hierarch resided.

Although people always thought of Scorpia as the castle where Demon King Solomon lived, that was actually not true. During the time of the Demon King War, it was merely the location of a military stronghold. The Demon King's true residence remained a mystery to this day.

Scorpia at Zohar had been built three hundred years ago. Due to the tyrannical administration at the time, it was known as the era of the Mad Lord, Targal Solomon, who styled himself as the reincarnation of the Demon King. He was assassinated by his retainer Hajid Kahn. Thereafter, his legacy was inherited by his descendants as successive hierarchs of the Demon King cult.

Right now, the one sitting on the hierarch's throne was Sjora Kahn, the Witch of Venomous Snakes.

After the conclusion of the Blade Dance tournament, she had assassinated her own father to usurp the throne.

The witch with eyes of red—

"...What a pain. They keep popping up endlessly like maggots no matter how many we kill."

Standing at a balcony of the palace, Sjora looked at the plaza and gnashed her teeth in annoyance.

Displayed on the palace plaza were the decapitated corpses of traitors.

This was meant to warn those who disrespected her. However, even after executing more than half of the old retainers, traitorous rebels still kept appearing out of the woodwork.

Thanks to the Holy Kingdom's aid, the coup d'etat itself was a success, but Sjora's control of the nation was nowhere near firm. Opposition to Sjora's ascension was erupting all over the Theocracy, producing insurgencies in various cities. Led by Dracunia, first and foremost, the surrounding nations were also watching menacingly. Then there was Murders, the merchant faction local to Zohar, that regarded this as a business opportunity and was secretly fanning flames of civil unrest.

"...Why, why isn't everything in my control!?"

Unable to suppress her anger, Sjora threw a wine glass against a wall, smashing it.

"Sjora-sama! Is something wrong!?"

Hearing the commotion, princess maidens ran to the balcony in panic.

A girl named Valmira had been looking after Sjora's daily needs ever since childhood. She was Sjora's closest of confidants and her only trusted retainer in the palace.

"...Nothing. Go bring me a replacement glass."

"As you wish—"

Looking at the timid girl who had her head down, Sjora asked impatiently:

"Do you have something to report to me?"

"U-Umm..."

Valmira hesitated before shutting her mouth.

"Out with it, quick. Or would you like to join those people lying in the plaza?"

After Sjora spoke with threatening tone, Valmira finally mustered her determination and spoke:

"Just now, I received news of the rebel army gathering at the military stronghold of the Demon's Fist."

"The Demon's Fist—"

Sjora narrowed her eyes slightly.

The Demon's Fist was an impregnable fortress built at the mining city of Mordis, situated northeast of Zohar. On top of a rocky mountain, it was named for its appearance that resembled a raised fist. Mordis was not only an important military base but also the top producer of spirit crystals in the country. Without a hold on Mordis, any talk of unifying the country would be utterly ludicrous.

"All previous rebellions had been small in scale within towns and cities, but this time they have united together. I fear that relying on our domestic forces will no longer be enough."

Valmira's gaze showed urgency.

In truth, the Theocracy's army was pitifully weak compared to that of Ordesia or Dracunia. Furthermore, their morale had fallen dramatically after suppressing these increasingly serious rebellions. Not only that, a substantial proportion had deserted the army and betrayed the hierarchy by secretly joining the rebel army. If their own nation's army failed to quell the rebellions, it would give other countries a pretext for military intervention.

"Of course, these traitors deserve nothing less than the hammer of punishment—"

Valmira timidly sneaked a glance at her monarch's face.

But unexpectedly, Sjora did not show signs of anger.

Licking her blood-red lips, she sneered with delight.

"Is that so? For them to gather in one spot, how perfect."

"...May I ask what do you mean by that?"

"I have grown weary of playing with bugs. This is an excellent chance to exterminate them in one fell swoop, these fools who dare to oppose me."

"Well, you have a point there, but..."

Valmira swallowed the words that were about to leave her lips.

Easier said than done. Since ancient times, the Demon's Fist had been an impregnable fortress. That was presumably the reason why the rebel army had chosen it as their stronghold. Given the Theocracy's current military strength, conquering it would not be that easy.

"—Let's use *that* and we'll be able to take care of them instantly."

"*That*...?"

Valmira cocked her head... What on earth was she talking about?

"Yes, it would be perfect as a test subject, wouldn't you agree?"

"...!?"

The moment Sjora Kahn grinned with a sneer...

Valmira finally understood her intent.

"...No way, you intend to release that seal!?"



Chapter 3 - Reunion

Part 1

A few days passed after the Greyworth attack incident that had shaken Dracunia from top to bottom.

The Knights of the Dragon Emperor had conducted a thorough search of the bottom of the canyon but to no avail. Not the slightest trace of Greyworth could be found.

However, Kamito was not surprised.

(That hag's not the type to die that easily...)

Perhaps I might be crossing blades with her again — No, I'm sure I will. Kamito felt a premonition bordering on certainty.

While waiting for the return of Rubia and her ship from picking up Muir and Lily in the Holy Kingdom, Kamito had been training his dual wielding skills day and night.

Now that Restia was back, it would be best to train up his balance in using dual swords, giving him more of an edge when fighting Greyworth. After all, the swordsmanship she had taught Kamito consisted only of orthodox knight skills, whose movements she could see through completely.

"Kamito, there is no need to use the darkness spirit's sword. Having me is enough."

While Kamito was practicing sword swings, Est spoke in a completely emotionless voice while in sword form.

"Is that so? I don't think it's possible for the Dusk Witch to be defeated by using Miss Sacred Sword alone, is it?"

"We will win. Even without the darkness spirit, Kamito and I will win."

"Hey, you two, could you please get along..."

Laying the swords down on the ground, Kamito sighed.

...Arguments in his mind like this would weaken his concentration.

"Est, weren't you such a great elder sister when Restia had her amnesia?"

"Well—"

Est was at a loss for words.

"Fufu, let's get along, Onee-chan."

"Shut up, darkness spirit—"

The steel blade flashed and blinked in apparent fury.

Part 2

"...Good grief, if only those two could get along better."

After ending his training with his two contracted spirits and having a shower at the purification site to wash off his sweat, Kamito made his way to the Knights' medical facility where Leonora was hospitalized.

Wounded by Greyworth's cursed blade, Leonora was in need of convalescence. She finally regained consciousness this morning and Kamito heard that she had recovered to the point where visits were allowed.

Arriving at the treatment room, Kamito knocked on the door.

"It's me, Leonora. Can I come in?"

"Kamito? Y-Yes, no problem—"

Hearing the reply, Kamito pushed the door open gently.

At that instant...

"...What the heck!?"

Kamito could not help but raise his voice in surprise.

Before his eyes was a completely unexpected scene.

Sitting up on the bed, Leonora was tenderly caressing her massively bulging abdomen that was under the bedsheets.

"W-What, what what..."

"...? Is there a problem, Kamito?"

"Y-Y-You, that..."

Seeing Kamito's mouth opening and closing—

"Ohh, *you mean this child?*"



Leonora smiled with a chuckle.

"It grew big, thanks to your seed —"

She said that extremely naturally.

"...!?"

The shocking words turned Kamito's mind blank for a moment.

"...H-Hold on a second! I didn't do anything!"

Kamito cried out in a panic.

...It had happened on the day when Kamito and company arrived in Dracunia. Taking Kamito on a tour of the dragon capital, Leonora had invited him to ride in a flying private room, a Dragondola, and even asked for his seed while they were there.

"W-What the hell is going on..."

Seeing Kamito still in a fluster...

"...My oh my, Kamito, couldn't you just play along?"

"Huh?"

Leonora shrugged and smiled wryly before lifting the sheets over her abdomen lightly.

What was revealed underneath was —

Big enough for a person to wrap their arms around, a giant egg whose surface was the color of lapis lazuli.

"Oh —"

Kamito had some recollection of this type of egg. It was a drake egg that he had seen in the dragon capital, at a shop that sold local specialties.

"This was given to me by a friend from the Knights of the Dragon Emperor, because an ancient legend says that drake eggs have the ability to heal wounds and relieve pain."

"Y-You..."

Muttering in exasperation, Kamito breathed a sigh of relief.

"...Well, you look like you're in better health than I imagined. I'm so glad."

Stepping into the treatment room, he sat down on a chair by the bed.

"Are your wounds okay now?"

"Yes, essentially. It had been dangerous for a while, but apparently that stage has passed."

Nothing less expected from someone contracted to a dragon spirit whose blessings included physical enhancement. Her recovery ability far surpassed that of ordinary people even though inferior to Kamito, who was protected by the power of Darkness Elemental Lord Ren Ashdoll.

"Are you able to eat normally now?"

"Yes, no problem... But I now have a craving for steak."

"...No, I think steak'd be a bad idea."

While making an incisive remark, Kamito took out a few fruits from a bag. Known as dragonfruits, these were shaped like dragon scales and were said to contain high-quality divine power.

Just as Kamito used a fruit knife to cut open the hard skin—

"Kamito—"

"Hmm?"

"You kept your promise with me."

Thus spoke Leonora.

The promise she mentioned was probably referring to her request to Kamito just before she lost consciousness.

Protect the Dragon King, protect Dracunia—Those had been her words to Kamito.

"...The one who saved the Dragon King was Restia, not me."

Kamito shook his head in response. If anything, he considered himself the one at fault for leaving the Dragon King's side because he had failed to realize that Greyworth's attack was a diversion.

"No, you did protect Dracunia. I express our gratitude to you on behalf of the Knights of the Dragon Emperor. Thank you, Kamito."

Gazing at Kamito's face, Leonora smiled tenderly. To see such an innocent smile on her, in contrast to her usual ways that resembled a carnivorous dragon's, Kamito could not help but stare, mesmerized.

"Uh, how should I put this, that doesn't count..."

While taking care not to expose his internal loss of composure, Kamito tried his best to speak as calmly as possible.

"Uh, is there anything else I can do?"

In return for Leonora's assistance at Ordesia's capital, he had promised to perform one favor for her.

Something like protecting the Dragon King was something he would have done even without Leonora asking him. Taking that as fulfilling his promise was not something Kamito could personally accept.

"Then, a child —"

"Anything but that."

"...Hmm, choosing something other than a child, now that is quite a difficult choice."

Resting a finger on her lovely lips, Leonora began to deliberate seriously...
What the heck.

After a while, she slowly lifted her face —

"Th-Then, c-could you help wipe down my body?"

"Huh?"

"Uh, due to resting in bed for so long, I have gotten quite sweaty."

"Uh, isn't it better to ask ladies in the facility for that kind of thing?"

"Kamito, did you not say you would do anything?"

Leonora pouted with displeasure.

"Well, uh..."

"I am simply asking for your help to wipe off the sweat that is causing me discomfort. Or are you admitting to harboring impure thoughts?"

"F-Fine..."

Kamito shook his head in a panic when she glared at him.

(...Sigh, I made a promise after all.)

Kamito soaked a towel in a bucket of water that was on a bedside table, then wrung it dry.

Leonora turned her back to Kamito and slid her loose robe down her shoulders. The elegant curves of her back were evocative of smooth white porcelain.

Kamito nervously held his breath but quickly mustered his determination and pressed the towel against her back.

"...Hyah... Mmmm♪"

In that instant, Leonora's body shook slightly.

Kamito exhaled a little and began to wipe her pale back carefully.

While averting his gaze and trying not to look at her massive bust, Kamito meticulously wiped the sweat off her back. Despite the supple muscles on her body, her skin was very smooth and delicate in contrast to her image of wielding a massive sword. Presumably, this was due to the physical enhancement effects from dragon attribute magic, which eschewed the need for increasing unnecessary muscles.

"...Ah... Ahhhh♪"

When he touched her lower back, Leonora made a strange sound.

"W-What the heck!?"

"Th-The way you touched me felt a bit erotic..."

Leonora spoke with a troubled look.

"Y-You're getting the wrong idea!"

"Y-Yes, I know... But, there... Ah♪"

"That's way too sensitive of you!"

"S-Sorry, this actually, the first time, for my skin, t-to be touched by a man..."

Blushing, Leonora explained awkwardly.

"I-I see..."

Told something like that straight to his face, Kamito was starting to feel his heart start pounding too.

"Oh, uh, I can wipe the front on my own, do not worry."

"Yeah, please do that..."

Recalling the sight of her breasts in the Dragondola, Kamito could not help but blush.

While his heart continued to pound uncontrollably, Kamito finished the job of wiping her back, dipped the towel in the water and wrung it dry again.

Putting on her loose robe again, Leonora lowered her head shyly. Flushed slightly red, her neck looked especially sexy.

"Thank you very much, Kamito. It felt wonderful."

With a demure expression, Leonora thanked him.

"...O-Okay."

Kamito nodded ambiguously in response then coughed lightly and stood up from his seat.

"Th-Then it's time for me to go. I'll be a bother if I stay too long."

"R-Really? I do not consider you a bother..."

Leonora murmured with slight disappointment. Then she switched to a serious expression.

"You will be heading to the Theocracy next. Please be extra careful. During the Blade Dance, there was one time when I fought the witch named Sjora Kahn and sensed a dangerous aura from her."

"...Yeah, I know."

Kamito nodded.

"I really would like to go assist you, but unfortunately, I still need to recuperate for a while before I can move around freely. Furthermore, if I were to help out, public opinion might start saying that Legitimate Ordesia relies on Dracunia's power, so—"

"It's the sentiment that counts. Thank you, Leonora."

Kamito extended his right hand and Leonora gripped it firmly.

"May you and your companions be blessed by Dragon's Protection. Let us have another blade dance together after I recover."

"Yeah, I look forward to it."

"Of course, I am not referring to a *blade dance of the night*."

"No duh!"

Confronted with Leonora whose cheeks went red all at once, Kamito could not help but retort.

(...Hoo boy, the way she thinks is always like a dragon, that Leonora.)

Leaving the treatment room, Kamito shrugged in exasperation while walking along the corridor.

However, that side of Leonora was also part of her charm.

At that moment—

"Hey, hold it right there, Demon King of the Night!"

"...?"

Hearing a sudden roar of fury, Kamito looked back.

At the far end of the corridor was Leonora's adjutant, Yuri El Cid. Glaring at Kamito with a scary gaze, she was approaching rapidly.

Idolizing Leonora, Yuri had treated Kamito with hostility ever since the Blade Dance due to his rumored reputation as the Demon King of the Night.

"...C-Can I help you?"

Intimidated by her forceful voice, Kamito asked.

"We just received word via flying dragon. Your friends are returning from Dragon's Peak."

Part 3

At the flying dragon landing zone of the dragon capital's military port, Kamito welcomed Claire and the girls.

He was served the famous Dragon Tea while waiting on a terrace at the landing zone. After half an hour, two mid-sized flying dragons arrived from the direction of the Kelbreth Mountain Range.

"Oh, looks like they're here..."

Standing up, Kamito waved from the center of the landing zone.

Soon after, the flying dragons carrying Claire and the girls slowly landed after circling in the air once.

"Thank you for being patient, Kamito-kun. It's been a week." "You have waited long enough, Kamito."

The first to land was the dragon carrying Fianna and Ellis.

Unloading their heavy luggage to the ground, the two girls seemed quite upbeat judging from their expressions.

"How did your training go, you two?"

When Kamito asked, the two girls exchanged a glance.

"Extremely well, of course!" "Indeed, I feel like I have had growth that surprises even myself."

They both made thumbs-up gestures.

"I see. It's true that I feel a completely different vibe from you compared to before the training."

Kamito offered his honest opinion. Trained at the Instructional School, Kamito could sense student-like naivety and inexperience from them before, but this impression had vanished now.

(...I can't believe they went through such a great change in as short as a week's training. What kind of training did they go through?)

Just as Kamito was thinking that...

"Fufu, do we seem a little more mature to you now?"

Chuckling, Fianna wrapped her arm around Kamito.

"...H-Hey, Fianna!?"

Instantly blushing to his ears, Kamito cried out. At that moment...

"H-Hold on, what are you doing to Kamito, you pervert princess!"

"Your Highness, th-that is so unfair!"

With the sound of a whip cracking, Claire and Rinslet landed too.

Claire hurried over to Kamito's side and pulled Fianna's arm off from Kamito.

Fianna stuck out her tongue mischievously and released Kamito for now.

"Sheesh, that's enough..."

Claire murmured with exasperation.

Kamito gently patted Claire on the head.

"...Huahhh, what are you doing!?"

"I'm so glad that you're all fine. After all, I heard that Dragon's Peak is a dangerous place."

Fianna and Ellis nodded to agree with Kamito.

"Yes, it is a place as dangerous as rumored —"

"Indeed. I never expected it would turn into that kind of training..."

"...What exactly was the training like?"

When Kamito asked with curiosity, the four girls shared their experiences training on Dragon's Peak.

On a plateau all covered by thick mist, Scarlet had discovered an ancient temple, which was where the dark dragon Vritra was sealed a thousand years ago, ending his rule over the region. Next they had borrowed the historical site from the dark dragon to use for training —

"Wait, a dark dragon? Were you girls okay?"

Halfway through, Kamito could not help but interrupt to ask.

"According to the dark dragon, it lost its powers when Est apparently did quite a number on it a thousand years ago. What we encountered was a weird creature resembling a flattened lizard."

"...Any recollections, Est?"

"None."

When Kamito asked, the Demon Slayer hanging at his waist replied indifferently.

"...I see. Oh well, in any case, you girls were training at the ancient ruins, right?"

"Indeed. We entered the ruins and were teleported individually to our own alternate dimension."

According to Claire, the ancient site was apparently a place for staging one-on-one duels against an individual whom one had to surpass. Claire had taken on her elder sister Rubia while Fianna, Ellis and Rinslet each had to confront their own special opponents of destiny.

"Likewise for me, Rubia-sama appeared too. But instead of her current self, it was Rubia-sama from four years ago, the one whom I had failed to stop."

"The one I encountered was my own self who had despaired from failing to save Judia."

"I-I faced off against the Ren Ashbell-sama of my ideals."

"I-I see..."

Hearing what Ellis said at the end, Kamito looked away, somewhat embarrassed.

...In any case, the training that Claire and the girls had completed was utterly different from what the Academy offered.

"Everyone worked so hard —"

Just as Kamito muttered...

"Looks like a lot happened over here too."

Claire spoke with a serious expression.

"Have you already heard about the incident?"

"Yes, on our way back, we heard from the Knights of the Dragon Emperor. From what they said, Kamito, you fought a battle against the headmistress on the bridge when she invaded the Stronghold."

"Uh, about the headmistress —"

Seeing Ellis beginning to speak worried, Kamito shook his head.

"Greyworth fell into the canyon. Although the Dracunia knights have been searching for her, nothing has come up yet."

"Is that so —"

Ellis looked down and bit her lip.

"...She is still alive, right?"

"Yeah, that hag won't die even if you try to kill her."

"I-I suppose you are right..."

"Yes. Indeed that is so."

To students of the Academy like these girls, Greyworth was their most respected hero.

"We might need to fight Greyworth again. When the time comes, let's wake her up together."

"Yes—"

Claire and the girls exchanged glances and nodded firmly.

"—But before that, we have to save that Theocracy princess first."

"...True. When will Rubia-sama and the others be back?"

Looking up at the sky where Dracunia's flying dragons were dancing, Fianna murmured softly to herself.

Part 4

As it turned out, coincidentally in the evening of the same day, Kamito and company received a report that the Revenant had returned to Dracunia's military port after the trip to the Holy Kingdom.

"It's almost like she knew when our training would end."

This perfect timing surprised Claire.

"Yeah..."

Her speculation was probably right. There was no doubt that guiding Claire and the girls to the dark dragon's temple was precisely Rubia's intent. It would not be a stretch to imagine Rubia calculating how much time they would need to complete their training either.

Kamito and company hastily packed their belongings and met up at the military port.

Although Leonora wanted to see him off, she reluctantly relented when Kamito repeatedly advised her to prioritize recuperation above all else.

Instead, the Knights of the Dragon Emperor came in her place and provided flying militarized spirits as aid for Ordesia.

"This is the Vouivre-type flying spirit officially equipped by the knights of Dracunia. Although it is unsuited for combat, its high mobility and agile turning ability ought to come in handy."

"Thanks a lot. After all, except for Ellis, mobility is our weakness."

Kamito gratefully accepted the seal tablet handed over by Vice-Captain Yuri.

"Try not to die, Team Scarlet. Although we lost to you during the Blade Dance, I hope for a future rematch against you."

"As you wish. We are ready any time."

Claire nodded fearlessly and agreed.

"May fortune be in your favor. May Legitimate Ordesia be blessed by Dragon's Protection."

Headed by Yuri, the Knights of the Dragon Emperor saluted collectively.

Under the military port's illumination, the Revenant's massive hull landed on the ground.

The flying ship's hatch immediately opened and the gangway ladder descended.

At that very moment, the petite figure of a young girl shot out from the hatch.

"Onii-sama~!"

"...M-Muir!?"

Rushing at Kamito at the bottom of the gangway ladder, she threw herself into his bosom.

Kamito hastily spread his arms and caught the petite girl.

"Ahah, Onii-sama, I missed you so much!"

"Muir, I can't breathe..."

Hugging Kamito by the neck, Muir was very excited.

Her twintails were rubbing against his cheeks, tickling him.

Just as this was happening to Kamito, he felt cold stares stabbing into his back.

"U-Unbelievable, making such a young girl call him 'Onii-sama'..." "It wasn't easy to revise my opinion of him, but ultimately, his true nature remains that of a fiendish Demon King." "I must implore for Leonora-sama to slice *that* off...!"

He turned his head, only to see the Knights of the Dragon Emperor whispering dangerous words among themselves. The trust he had built up by protecting Leonora was apparently dropping down to abysmal levels.

Meanwhile, the members of Team Scarlet...

"Sigh, Kamito-kun hasn't changed the slightest." "Mm-hmm." "Same as always." "...~!"

...In a way, their trust in Kamito had not changed at all.

That filled Kamito with mixed feelings too—

"W-Wait, that is enough. Hands off now!"

At that moment, Claire's crimson hair stood up and she roared angrily.

"What's the matter? Do you wanna start a fight with me, Onee-chan? Even when you're so weak."

Muir smiled with condescension and retorted.

"Th-Things have changed since our defeat last time! We've been growing stronger the whole time!"

"Hmph, really? Then let's play next time, but I'm not in the mood right now. Onii-sama has to play with me next."

Still hugging Kamito and refusing to let go, Muir stuck out her tongue.

"...~I-I-I'll turn you into charcoal!"

Just as Claire raised the flaming whip in her hand...

"Muir, what are you doing? Stop causing conflict in a place like this."

Muir's partner, Lily hastily descended the gangway ladder.

"Not a conflict, just saying hello. Hello."

"Good grief..."

Seeing Muir completely nonchalant, Lily sighed with mental exhaustion.

"Hello, it's been a while, Lily."

When Kamito greeted her...

"Hmph, I never thought I would ever team up with you again—"

Her crimson eyes, unique to the Elfim race, stared at Kamito.

Ranked sixth in the Instructional School—Lily Flame was the expert in espionage and infiltration. Back during their days at the Instructional School, she had often partnered with Kamito on missions. Even though they

had been enemies in the Blade Dance, Kamito considered her an extremely reliable helper as soon as they were on the same side.

"I only take orders from the Cardinal. I do not plan on getting familiar with you at all."

"Yeah, I know."

"You guys. A reunion is fine and all, but do hurry up and board —"

Hearing the sudden voice coming from within the ship, Kamito and company looked up in surprise.

"Esteemed sister!"

Ellis called out loudly.

With an overcoat of pure white draped over her, Velsaria Eva appeared at the gangway ladder.

"Esteemed sister, is your health alright now?"

"Yes, there is no problem."

Confronted with Ellis' concerned inquiry, Velsaria nodded simply. Then she said:

"More importantly, the Revenant will be heading to the city of Mordis in the Theocracy."

"Mordis?"

"The stronghold where the Theocracy's rebel forces have gathered. The Cardinal is currently there."

Part 5

"...O-Ooh... Ooh..."

In absolute darkness with vision and hearing sealed off...

The chained girl could not help but moan in pain.

Her hair was beautiful and golden. Possessing the same bewitching eyes that glowed crimson like her elder sister's, this girl was precisely none other than Saladia Kahn, the second princess of the Alphas Theocracy.

On the day of the coup d'etat at Scorpia, she had resisted her elder sister's attempt to kill their father the king, Rajihal Kahn, and ended up imprisoned here, the most notorious prison in Zohar.

...After that, it was anyone's guess as to how much time had gone by.

In this darkness insulated from all light, her sense of time had grown hazy. At this rate, she could very well forget even her own identity one day.

She was still able to cling to her sense of identity, thanks to her training at the Divine Ritual Institute, but any normal person would have gone insane long ago.

The truth of this darkness was an *isolation barrier* crafted by a cult sorcerer. No spirit, no matter how strong, could break the barrier from inside.

(...Why hasn't my sister killed me?)

She had asked herself this question many times.

Having killed their father and taken control of the Theocracy's government, there should be no need for her to keep Second Princess Saladia alive. Factions opposed to Sjora would probably band together under Saladia's name. Or perhaps, that was precisely the intent. Was Sjora planning to use Saladia as a hostage so as to wipe out the rebel army in one fell swoop when they came to save her?

...Impossible to read Sjora's thinking. Ever since the Blade Dance, she had changed. Although she was a crafty schemer to begin with, Sjora was not supposed to be someone to take bold action like this.

(Indeed, it's almost as though *she has been possessed by something*—)

Just as she was lost in her thoughts...

"—Hey, are you there? The second princess, inheriting the Kahn dynasty's bloodline?"

"Huh?"

Sjora jumped in surprise to hear the sudden voice.

It was not the usual princess maiden who brought food and water.

Instead, it was a young man's voice, resembling a savage beast's.

"...Who are you?"

Staying wary, Saladia asked quietly.

"I am the one asking questions here. Are you the Theocracy's Second Princess Saladia Kahn?"

"...Yes, indeed. That is I."

—While feeling offended by this rude man, she still answered.

Despite the visitor's unknown identity, at least he did not seem to work for her sister.

"...I see. Ha, looks like I'm in luck for once."

The man laughed heartily from across the darkness. In the next instant, the darkness sealing Saladia's vision and hearing was broken by light from a spirit crystal, lighting up the surroundings immediately.

The sudden light entering her eyes caused Saladia to groan.

She could not get a clear look at the man's face because he was wearing a hood that reached his eyes.

"I'll get straight to the point. Do you know the Pyramid's location?"

"...The Pyramid?"

"Yeah, it's rumored to be where Demon King Solomon's remains were buried after he was vanquished a thousand years ago. It's said that the secret location was passed down the generations, known only to those inheriting the royal bloodline — "

Saladia fell silent. Of course, she knew about the Pyramid. Her father, King Rajihal Kahn had told her the day she completed her contract ritual with her contracted spirit.

However, why did this man know about this secret, never mentioned to anyone outside the royal family?

"This is the deal. I'll help you escape this place and in exchange, you'll take me there."

"...What are your intentions?"

Saladia demanded an answer from him solemnly. How could the Demon King cult's greatest secret be told to him in this place where they could be overheard? Leading the way for him would be even more out of the question.

"None of your business. Forget that, hurry up and make your decision. Although I've knocked out the guards, it'll be hard to escape once reinforcements arrive. You don't want to spend the rest of your life here, do you?"

"...Hmm, well—"

Saladia bit her lip and fell into deep thought. This man was very dangerous. Her instincts as a princess maiden informed her. However, this could very well be her one and only chance to escape from her sister's grasp.

"Will you be able to take me out of this city safely?"

"Yeah, I guarantee you that. Even if I found out the tomb's location, the door won't open without someone of royal blood there, right?"

"...You are quite informed."

Saladia sighed with resignation and made her decision.

...This man's motives were unknown. However, taking his offer would still be better than keeping the royal family's secret while waiting here for her own execution.

"Fine. Suppose we were to escape from Zohar safely, then I shall take you to the Pyramid."

"Hmph, deal."

The man scoffed.

"Swear on it, by your spirit's name."

"You do not trust me?"

"My creed is to trust no one."

Hearing the young man's answer, Saladia shook her head in exasperation.

"I hereby swear upon my contracted spirit Scheherazade—"

After chanting the words of the oath, Saladia's body gave off a faint glow of divine power.

Swearing upon a spirit was the most solemn oath for an elemental. In the event of breaking the oath, one could lose the power of the spirit contract.

"Are you satisfied now?"

"Yeah, not bad—"

Nodding contentedly, the man took off his hood.

Revealed as the tanned face of a young man with malicious eyes.

"And your name?"

When Saladia asked, the man laughed savagely, showing his fangs.

"I am Jio Inzagi—The Demon King's successor."

Chapter 4 - Desert Voyage

Part 1

The military ship carrying Kamito and company, the Revenant, set off from Dracunia's military port.

Since Ordesia's airspace was off limits, the ship had to take a massive detour around the Kelbreth Mountain Range, flying on a route over the great forest of Ezos that did not belong to any country.

Mordis was a desert city near the border of the Quina Empire and had apparently been a military stronghold of the Theocracy during the Ranbal War. The fortress built on top of a mountain mine was also known as the Demon's Fist, and currently, the anti-Sjora factions were gradually gathering there.

Kamito and company boarded the ship and were first taken to the conference room.

Sitting on Kamito's right was Muir, who refused to let go of his arm, while Claire took the seat on his left.

"So Nee-sama isn't here..."

Claire murmured with a look of mixed feelings. Sitting at the head of the table, Velsaria nodded.

"Indeed, the Cardinal had disembarked at Mordis first. She is going to rally the believers of the Demon King cult to assemble."

"...The Demon King cult?"

Kamito and company stared at one another in surprise.

"Of the rebel forces gathered at Mordis, the majority consists of heretical Demon King cultists oppressed by Sjora Kahn. Securing their cooperation is necessary to succeed in rescuing Saladia Kahn."

"Heretical Demon King cultists? My esteemed sister, isn't the Demon King cult heretical to begin with—"

At that moment, Ellis timidly raised her hand and asked.

"There are apparently all kinds of sects and factions within the Demon King cult itself. The Kahn dynasty presides over the traditional dogma that holds the hierarch as supreme while relegating all other sects as heretics. During the late king's reign, leniency could apparently be obtained by paying taxes, but Sjora has rejected all heretical dogma and even pushed forward atrocities such as massacring believers. Because of this, heretical cultists have organized rebellions all over the country, forming a temporary united front with the goal of taking down the Sjora administration."

"—I see now."

Kamito nodded. It looked like Sjora had many enemies within the cult too. Rubia was probably planning to make use of them.

"However, how will she go about uniting the believers of the Demon King cult?"

"The Cardinal previously spent time in the Theocracy and apparently had frequent contact with one of the factions within the Demon King cult. From what I heard, she secured a position only second to the hierarch in rank. Simply by relying on her connections from that time and her own personal charisma, winning over the believer's hearts should not be anything difficult."

"As expected of Rubia-sama..."

"Indeed. Such inborn leadership charisma, a magnetic personality."

Rinslet and Ellis remarked poignantly.

"...Indeed. She is different from I who used fear and discipline to dominate my subordinates and ended up banished from the Sylphid Knights."

"E-Esteemed sister!? You did nothing wrong... You know?"

Seeing Velsaria poke fun at herself in self-deprecation with a chuckle, Ellis hastily offered support.

"...Well, let us put the past aside for now."

Coughing to clear to her throat, Velsaria continued.

"As for the rescue of Princess Saladia Kahn, we shall cooperate with the rebel forces at Mordis. No objections, right?"

Kamito's group exchanged looks and nodded together.

"The enemy's enemy is our friend. We have nothing against gaining more allies."

"Right. Besides, we're currently traitors of Ordesia too. In a way, we're the same as them."

Claire shrugged and commented.

"In that case, this discussion is over. Please enjoy your free time until we arrive at Mordis."

Part 2

Thus the meeting concluded. When leaving the conference room —

Claire suddenly halted.

"What's wrong, Claire?"

"I'm going to Nee-sama's study to research about the Theocracy. If she spent time in the Demon King cult, then I'm sure she'll have collected plenty of material."

Despite her looks, Claire was quite analytical in nature. Back when taking part in the Blade Dance, she had also researched about the other teams. This time, it looked like she was enthusiastic about gathering information about the enemy camp too.

"Then let's go together. I'd like to know more about the Demon King too."

Hearing Kamito say that...

"R-Really? I-I don't mind..."

Claire looked away a little shyly.

"Onii-sama, who cares about that? Come to my room and play."

Muir tugged Kamito's arm with both hands, refusing to release him.

"...Uh, how about after dinner?"

"Awww..."

Muir pouted unhappily.

Just as Kamito was caught in a dilemma —

"Muir-san, if it is alright with you, how about I play with you?"

Rinslet smiled tenderly and offered with a smile.

"No, I wanna play with Onii-sama."

"Muir, I'll play with you later. Why don't you play with Rinslet first?"

"...~!"

After Kamito placed his hand on her head, Muir very reluctantly said:

"...F-Fine. If you say so, Onii-sama, I'll play with this lady for a bit."

She released her grip on Kamito's arm at last.

"Then Rinslet, I'm entrusting Muir to you."

"Leave it to me. Very well, Muir-san, shall we head to the hall there?"

Rinslet bent down lightly and took Muir's hand.

"I-I am not a child —"

"Oh dear, then excuse me."

Smiling with a "fufu," Rinslet left with Muir.

Witnessing this scene, Kamito was a little surprised.

(...I can't believe Muir could behave so obediently towards someone other than Lily. I've never seen it before.)

Perhaps because Muir and Mireille were of similar age, Rinslet was particularly skilled at dealing with her.

"Th-Then let us be on our way too —"

"Hmm? Oh, right."

Rubia's study was located on the second floor of the ship.

Kamito went down the stairs while watching the twintails in front of him, dancing up and down.

...Somehow, it felt like Claire had matured a bit.

Was this an outcome from her training on Dragon's Peak too?

Just as he was thinking that, he suddenly lost his footing a little.

While Rubia was away from the ship, the Revenant was apparently controlled by Velka and Delia, the twins from the Instructional School, who took turns. The two of them did not seem quite familiar with the ship's controls.

"By the way, are you sure it's okay to enter Rubia's study without permission?"

Suddenly, he asked Claire who was leading the way.

"Isn't the answer obviously okay? I'm her younger sister, you know?"

"No wait, that logic is a bit..."

Kamito narrowed his eyes and remarked.

In front of the study...

"By the way, do you have a key?"

"No."

"Then what are we going to do?"

"This—Melt."

Claire chanted an incantation, instantly melting the keyhole.

"Come on, you..."

Seeing the usual charcoal ideology, Kamito smiled wryly in exasperation.

(...I guess that's one side of her that hasn't changed one bit.)

With the keyhole destroyed, the door slowly opened with a creaking sound. First to come into view was a set of bookshelves occupying an entire wall, containing a large collection of books.

The only furniture was the desk in the back of the room. This study, focused on practicality, was truly an authentic reflection of Rubia's personality.

"...What an amazing collection. It's full of rare books you won't find in the Academy library."

As a bibliophile, Claire exclaimed in wonder as soon as she stepped inside.

...Although Kamito had not the slightest idea about rareness, he could see that the shelves were definitely packed densely and neatly with ancient texts. There were history books on various countries, spiritology dictionaries, books about dragon species with covers bound using dragon scales, even books written in High Ancient whose titles Kamito could not read.

(...Wait a sec, aren't books in High Ancient impossible for ordinary people to get their hands on in the first place?!)

According to the stipulations of international treaties, personal possession of books in High Ancient left behind by the Elfim race was forbidden. They were items that one would not even be able to see unless visiting the Sealed Library under the Divine Ritual Institute's jurisdiction.

"Say, Claire..."

"What is it?"

"Don't tell me these books were stolen from the Divine Ritual Institute's library?"

"N-Nee-sama couldn't have done something like that, right!?"

Claire frowned and said:

"However, the sealing talisman on this book seems quite thoroughly destroyed..."

"..."

"..."

"I-I'm sure she fully intends to return them eventually. Yeah, definitely."

Breaking out in cold sweat, Claire turned her gaze away.

Kamito looked at the bookshelves again, only to see research books about the Elemental Lords and the Holy Kingdom's history and geography.

Rubia's book collection really seemed to extend to all fields.

More surprisingly, it also included novels popular in the imperial capital. However, these were a little different from the romance novels that Claire read —

"Your sister is such an amazing reader..."

Kamito was stunned by the book collection's quality and quantity.

"Yes, Nee-sama started reading many difficult books since childhood.

During her time at the Divine Ritual Institute, she even received an imperial medal for publishing a paper on spiritology. I remember she was twelve years old at the time."

"...What a genius."

As expected of someone who had been chosen as a Queen, the pinnacle of princess maidens.

"When I was small, I often asked Nee-sama to read books to me..."

Staring at the bookshelves, Claire murmured nostalgically.

"But it's impossible to return to the past..."

"....."

Kamito was about to say something but decided against it.

On the way to Dracunia, Claire had felt troubled by the lack of interaction between herself and Rubia. It looked like they still had not been able to converse normally.

A complicated mess still seemed to stand between the two sisters.

"—Found it. A book on the Theocracy."

Saying that, Claire extracted a book from the shelf.

It was quite an ancient book, bound in animal skin. Although the title was not in High Ancient, it was still written in a lost language no longer in use today.

"Can you decipher it?"

"...Yes, I will try."

Claire took out her glasses, lit a magical flame in the air, then focused her gaze on the book.

As expected of the honors student of Raven Class. Despite running into occasional setbacks, she still managed to slowly decipher the book's contents.

Kamito could not help but stare, mesmerized by the side view of her face in total concentration.

"What's the matter?"

"...Oh, nothing. I should try to find if there are any books I can read."

Kamito frantically looked away and started searching the books within reach.

(Uh, books about the Demon King...)

In reality, what Kamito hoped to research was not the Theocracy's history but information about Solomon, the Demon King from a thousand years ago. As the dormant power of Darkness Elemental Lord Ren Ashdoll inside him gradually awakened, Kamito felt that it would be best to gain a detailed understanding of the man who had held the same power as himself.

Searching the bookshelves, Kamito finally found a book that he should be capable of reading.

...It looked like a book summarizing the Theocracy's history. Kamito opened the table of contents and began browsing the section that contained records related to Demon King Solomon.

—The Alphas Theocracy was founded roughly a thousand years ago. Its current capital, Zohar, was still a small city in the desert back then.

A sixteen-year-old youth had appeared at the time, Solomon. Capable of using spirits as a male, he was obeyed by seventy-two spirits that had been lying dormant across the lands. He sought to realize his ambition and quickly swept across the entire continent. Back then, the concept of deploying spirits into human warfare did not even exist, hence every nation lost badly against the Demon King's army that used spirits.

However, just as everyone thought that the Demon King's army would subjugate the entire continent, a young girl, who tended sheep, surfaced at what would be the border of the current Holy Kingdom of Lugia.

Entering a spirit contract with the legendary sacred sword, the girl assembled the Salvation Army to take down the Demon King. Hence, the three-year-long Demon King War broke out.

After many intense battles all over the continent, the Demon King finally fell to Sacred Maiden Areishia's sword. And in turn, the Sacred Maiden vanished together with the legendary sacred sword to whereabouts unknown —

Kamito closed the book gently.

(...There's nothing interesting here.)

Furthermore, there were some omissions in this book.

Kamito knew Sacred Maiden Areishia's true and final fate. Afflicted by the curse of the sacred sword that had vanquished numerous spirits, her body was turned into a statue.

And the legendary sacred sword in question was currently —

(...In my hand, huh? Destiny feels more and more unbelievable to me.)

Just as Kamito was having these poignant thoughts...

"Kamito, I've managed to decipher this to some extent..."

Claire lifted her face from her book and said to him.

"Really?"

Hearing that, Kamito poked his head over to peer at the book.

"Huahhh, y-your face is too close, idiot!"

"S-Sorry..."

"Sheesh..."

Blushing, Claire coughed and cleared her throat.

"So, what's this book actually about?"

When Kamito asked...

"Yes, this a book about the Demon King's princess maidens — "

"...!?"

Hearing what Claire said, Kamito could not help but hold his breath.

"The Demon King's princess maidens" — Of course he had some idea about that term.

Reportedly, Demon King Solomon had shared his power with nine concubines he had obtained from the conquered nations, placing them in trusted and important positions as generals in the Demon King's army. Rubia had speculated in the past, wondering whether this was the same as Kamito sharing Ren Ashdoll's power with the girls in his team through kissing.

"—Demon King Solomon apparently forced the princesses of conquered nations to serve him in all kinds of ways... W-What a despicable man!"

"Y-Yeah. The Demon King was truly despicable!"

Kamito averted his eyes semi-evasively.

"Incidentally, this truly lives to its name as a forbidden book, designated for sealing by the Divine Ritual Institute. The history books at the Academy

library did not make a single mention of the existence of the Demon King's princess maidens."

Claire commented while reading the pages.

"Well, the Divine Ritual Institute would end up in a difficult position if word got out that the princess maidens had assisted the Demon King."

"That's why they covered it up, which is a bit—Kyah"

At that moment, the Revenant suddenly shook violently, causing books to fall down in a clatter.

"...!"

Kamito hastily jumped on top of Claire to shield her using his back.



"Oww... Are you okay, Claire?"

"Eh? Y-Yes..."

Her ruby-like eyes were widened in surprise. Claire nodded obediently.

"Those twins don't seem too used to steering the ship —"

Just as Kamito was about to get up...

"Hyah♪"

Claire exclaimed quietly.

"...?"

Only then did Kamito finally notice.

Boing. A not very big feeling on his right hand.

Apparently, he had pressed his hand on her chest the moment they hit the floor.

"...S-Sorry!?"

Kamito hastily withdrew his hand and stood up.

"J-Just now, it was an accident!"

"I-I know..."

"Huh?"

"Th-Thank you, for protecting me..."

Blushing bright red, Claire turned her head and avoided eye contact shyly.

(...W-What's going on?)

Kamito was shocked. Normally, Claire would surely go all out in charcoal mode.

"Anyway, let's first tidy up the fallen books—"

Patting her skirt, Claire stood up.

"Y-Yeah, that's right..."

Kamito was just reaching for a fallen book when...

"Kyahhh, w-what the heck is that!?"

"What's wrong?"

Kamito followed Claire's gaze—

Only to see the book designated for sealing, which Claire had been reading, flipped to a certain page.

"What!?"

Kamito was rendered speechless. After all, the content shown —

Unmentionable illustrations of princess maidens in all sorts of unseemly poses.

"...~! I-Idiot, what are you making me see, pervert!"

Hastily closing the book, Claire blushed intensely while hammering her fists on Kamito.

"H-Hold on, this isn't my fault!"

"True, but, oooh~..."

Going teary-eyed, Claire stood up and brusquely stuffed the scattered books back onto the shelves.

"I-I am searching the shelves over there!"

Having done so, she awkwardly averted her eyes and went to the bookshelves on another side.

(Good grief, what kind of books are Rubia keeping here...?)

While muttering, Kamito was just about to return the book in his hand to its original spot...

"...Hmm?"

He suddenly frowned.

He saw several letters between the books.

The handwriting on these especially formal letters was familiar to Kamito.

(Could these be...?)

Part 3

"Ahh. The pieces are knocked over, so the game just now is voided."

"S-So unfair! I was clearly winning just now!"

When Muir suggested restarting the game, Rinslet protested.

The wooden game pieces, featuring designs such as dragons or lions to simulate spirits, were scattered on the floor. Due to the ship shaking earlier, the entire game board had flipped.

"Let us switch, Rinslet. I shall be her opponent this time."

Saying that, Fianna started to place the pieces on the game board.

In response, Muir frowned with displeasure.

"No way. You seem very strong."

"A-Are you suggesting I am weak!?"

Indignant, Rinslet cried out loudly.

"I am quite confident in the area of board games. After all, I used to play alone with the pieces back when I shut myself in the palace every day."

"I-I see..."

Not knowing how to react, Rinslet replied ambiguously.

At that moment, the door to the room suddenly opened.

"—I think it is time to prepare dinner. Any requests?"

Ellis came to ask after practicing her spear skills on the deck earlier.

"...So it is already that time of the day? Allow me to help, Captain."

"I see. Thanks for the help."

"We will settle the score later."

"Eh—"

Losing a well-matched opponent, Muir sounded unhappy.

"Let me help too. Is that alright, Ellis?"

Saying that, Fianna was about to stand up.

Ellis froze for a moment then immediately shook her head in a panic.

"C-Certainly not, how could the princess of Legitimate Ordesia deign to do such chores—"

"Well said! Your Highness, please serve as Muir-san's opponent."

"...I-Is that so?"

Faced with forceful opposition from the two girls, Fianna cocked her head in puzzlement.

Part 4

Stepping into the galley, Ellis and Rinslet swiftly put on their aprons and started preparing dinner efficiently.

Nothing more needed to be said about Rinslet, whose culinary skills rivaled a professional chef's. Ellis was similarly talented at cooking. Even though the stock of ingredients in the food storage was not very plentiful, the two of them still worked together with tacit coordination to pick out usable ingredients one after another.

"This reminds me of cooking practicals at the Academy."

"Yes, indeed..."

Rinslet murmured nostalgically.

Right now, they had become traitors who had raised the banner of rebellion against Ordesia. They were unlikely to have the chance to return to Areishia Spirit Academy as students again —

"Let me be responsible for the soup and the appetizers, as well as a meat dish. What are you planning to make?"

"I would like to try my hand at a bean curd dish I recently learned."

"...Bean curd huh? I recall that it is food from Kamito's homeland."

"Yes, it is extremely healthy and rich in nutrition."

Rinslet snapped her fingers and summoned Fenrir, her contracted spirit.

When Fenrir opened his jaws wide, many ingredients and cooking utensils stored in Astral Zero appeared.

Bean curd and other ingredients not native to Ordesia were inside too.

"This is handmade bean curd prepared at Laurenfrost."

Rinslet puffed out her chest in pride. However, Ellis looked a bit troubled.

"Bean curd is definitely delicious, but as a main course, would its flavor not be too bland?"

She raised this question.

"Oh, worry not. I will be making a legendary bean curd dish popular in the Quina Empire. Its name is 'mapo doufu'."

"Mapo doufu...?"

"Yes, it is dish where abundant chili peppers and spices are used to make a paste that perfectly blends savoriness and spiciness together. According to ancient literature, the taste is addictive."

"...I see. That is certainly something to look forward to."

Ellis gulped.

"Then I shall make some Quina-style appetizers to go along with your dish."

"Oh my, Captain, when did you start learning Quina cuisine?"

"I-I cannot allow myself to keep losing..."

Blushing, Ellis coughed lightly a few times.

At that moment—

"What are you doing? Snack person and tail person."

Rubbing her sleepy eyes while making an unsteady entrance, it was the sword spirit Est.

Supposed to be sleeping in sword form inside Kamito's room, it looked like she had woken up because dinner time was fast approaching.

"T-Tail person, is that me?"

Ellis touched her ponytail, a little offended.

"Dinner..."

Est murmured blankly then jumped up to peer at the kitchen counter.

"...Bean curd."

Without any facial expression, Est's violet eyes instantly glimmered brightly.

"Yes, Miss Sword Spirit. We will be making a dish with your favorite bean curd today."

"Bean curd, bean curd♪"

Est sang in a transparent voice then...

"In that case, I shall contribute a little too—"

She turned herself into a kitchen knife, manifesting in Rinslet's hand.

"Much appreciated, Miss Sword Spirit."

"What on earth is going on!?"

Ellis exclaimed in shock.

"Fufu, Miss Sword Spirit's kitchen knife is very amazing, you know?"

Saying that, Rinslet took a spring onion and sliced rapidly with the kitchen knife a few times. Tracing out a beautiful parabola, slices of spring onion flew into the bowl one after another.

"...T-Truly amazing, but is it alright to use the legendary sacred sword like this?"

With a complicated expression, Ellis asked in confusion.

"Fufu, as long as I create a new legend."

Making no sense in her words, Rinslet sprayed oil into a round iron pot taken from Fenrir's mouth and lit the stove.

"The fire is a bit lacking..."

"No helping it. This is equipment on a military ship, after all."

Although a small salamander spirit was sealed inside the stove's spirit crystal, it was not a powerful spirit to begin with. Added to the fact that the ground's blessings were absent when high up in the atmosphere, the spirit seemed quite lethargic.

"...Hmm, it would be impossible to recreate authentic mapo doufu using this weak a fire!"

Just as Rinslet fumed with an annoyed expression...

"Meow..."

She saw a hellcat clad in flames, passing through the corridor outside the galley.

While her master Claire had gone off with Kamito to do research, she was apparently strolling freely inside the ship.

"Miss Hellcat, perfect timing!"

Rinslet waved to Scarlet.

"Meow?"

Cocking her head in puzzlement, Scarlet still walked over.

Normally speaking, contracted spirits were not supposed to pay any attention to anyone except for their master. But because Rinslet frequently provided tasty snacks, Scarlet was quite close with her.

"Please start a strong fire —"

When Rinslet said that, Scarlet nimbly made her way under the iron pot and produced an intense flame from her tail. Compared to the fire from the salamander sealed in the spirit crystal, the difference in power was like heaven and earth.

"Fufu, as expected of Claire's contracted spirit!"

Pouring the bright red paste with bean curd into the iron pot, Rinslet started to stir fry vigorously. The spewing flames looked like they were going to burn all the way to the ceiling any moment.

"A-Are you sure about using such high heat? It could cause a kitchen fire!"

"Ohohoho, no need to worry. Just leave everything to me, the one who bears the name of Hellfire Rinslet!"

"...Wait a sec, is your nickname not Rinslet the Ice Demon?"

...Did some kind of weird switch get turned on? Seeing Rinslet getting more and more fired up, Ellis watched with worried eyes.

Part 5

At the Theocracy's capital of Zohar, in a small alley where not even a single ray of moonlight shone, two figures rushed past.

"Hey, hurry up, you clumsy fool. Do you want to go back to that prison?"

"W-Watch your mouth, I will have you know that I am this country's second princess."

Saladia Kahn protested against the young man's extremely rude tone.

"Huh? Do you understand your position?"

Jio Inzagi turned his head back, glaring at her with his crimson eyes. Never threatened like this before in all her life, Saladia could not help but feel her shoulders shudder.

"Right now, you are no princess at all. Like me, you're just an escaped prisoner. Shut up and obey me if you want to leave this place alive."

"...W-Well..."

Saladia opened her mouth, trying to object—

"...I suppose, yes. What you say is right..."

But she bit her lip in chagrin.

"Hmph, glad you know what's what. Now cut the useless chatter, *great princess*."

After saying that sarcastically, Jio Inzagi hid himself in a building's shadow.

This was roughly three districts away from the prison where Saladia had been jailed.

The reason why they had made so little progress was because Saladia's escape was quickly discovered and a large force of soldiers were sent into

the city. It would have been easy for Jio Inzagi to escape alone as an Instructional School graduate, but things were not so simple seeing as he had to take Saladia with him.

After several weeks of imprisonment, she was severely weakened. Thus it was necessary to give her time to recover enough energy to walk.

"—Tsk, what a pain. A bunch of military elementalists."

Hiding in the building's shadow with his presence concealed, Jio Inzagi muttered. A group of knights carrying spirit crystals for illumination had appeared, walking along the dark alley. It was Sjora Kahn's royal guard.

"Hold your breath until they pass—"

Saladia nodded silently.

(This man, although I have no idea how strong he is—)

She quietly assessed this self-styled "Demon King's successor" in front of her.

Judging from the fact that he had singlehandedly infiltrated the prison to rescue her, he must be quite skilled. But even so, she did not expect him to be a match for military elementalists. No matter how tough their physical body, there was definitely no way for ordinary people to win against elementalists—This was the absolute truth, impossible to overturn.

Saladia prided herself as her sister's equal as an elementalist, but there was little chance of winning when surrounded by this many spirit knights.

"But with such a tight net, there's no way to move around at all. And I've got this baggage that can't even run—"

Jio Inzagi grumbled quietly.

"Once dawn breaks, escaping will get progressively harder. If my sister's royal guard were to capture us, I will be taken back to that prison, and you will be subjected to avian execution."

"Avian execution?"

"Flayed and de-boned on a rocky mountain, you will remain alive while having your organs devoured by birds. This is the Theocracy's traditional form of execution."

Saladia smiled. She expected to see fear take hold of the face of this man who had shown insolence and arrogance all this time.

However —

"...Oh, *that*. I got tired of watching that show when I was young."

"Huh?"

"We've already seen true hell as children. By now, none of us fear death."

Jio Inzagi curled his lips in a grin and laughed mockingly.

His terrifying expression filled Saladia with bone-chilling terror.

(This man, what on earth...)

— At that moment...

"Hey, who goes there!?"

A sharp shout came from across the darkness.

"Tsk, we'll have to make a dash for it—"

Jio clicked his tongue, grabbed Saladia's wrist and ran through the alley.

"Found her, it's Saladia Kahn—!"

At the same time, fire arrows descended from above with the sound of spirit magic incantations in the surroundings.

Saladia suddenly halted and hastily chanted words of summoning to call forth her elemental waffe.

"—O spirits sealed within behind the gate to another world, make your appearance here now!"

Particles of light appeared out of thin air and a book manifested in her hand.

This was Alf Laylah Wa-Laylah, the elemental waffe of the demon spirit Scheherazade.

Light surged from the turning pages, summoning Gas Cloud, the spirit in black smoke form.

Gas Cloud expanded within the blink of an eye, swallowing all of the fire arrows.

Alf Laylah Wa-Laylah was an elemental waffe capable of summoning countless spirits residing within the book. Although high-level spirits could not be summoned, they were quite versatile.

"Hey, interesting spirit you've got there —"

Interested, Jio Inzagi muttered.

"However, this will not even achieve the goal of stalling for time against the royal guard."

"No, it's enough. This thing is *a perfect match for my powers.*"

"...Huh?"

Jio Inzagi sneered fearlessly then removed his overcoat.

This revealed his muscular body, covered by lightly tanned skin, as well as the ominous patterns carved all over him.

"What are you planning?"

"Shut up and watch—"

In the next instant, the lines carved all over his body began to glow ominously—

"...N-No way, cursed armament seals!?"

Saladia widened her eyes and cried out. The implantation of cursed armament seals ought to have been banned by an international treaty after the Ranbal War.

No, putting that aside, more surprising was—

"W-Why are you glowing with divine power when you are a man—"

"Hah, isn't it obvious? *I am the Demon King's successor.*"

With a savage grin, Jio replied.

"W-What is with that man—" "Impossible, cursed seal armaments!?" "An elemental!?"

The royal guard readied their elemental waffen, surrounding Jio and Saladia cautiously.

"...No way to escape now."

Saladia bit her lip hard. There was no absolutely no way to win against this many opponents.

However—

"Say, great princess. Can *that book* of yours summon spirits without limit?"

The man before him, with glowing crimson eyes, curled his lips in a faint smile.

"Yes, so long as my divine power is not depleted. However—"

Hearing Saladia's answer, Jio Inzagi scoffed.

"Great, have those spirits possess my cursed armament seals."

"Huh?"

Saladia could not believe her own ears.

"H-How is something like that possible—"

"The principle is the same as sealing spirits into amulets. Hurry up and do it, unless you want to be taken back by these people—"

"...F-Fine!"

Indeed, it was no time to be exchanging questions and answers back and forth. Despite her puzzlement, Saladia still summoned eight spirits of different elements.

Using her hand to touch the cursed seal armament that was glowing crimson on his arm, she sealed those spirits within it.

"Yeah, nice... This feeling brings back memories—"

(...What is this man planning to do?)

Just as Saladia watched the man in surprise...

"—Lemme show you, great princess. This is but the tip of the iceberg of the Demon King's power."

With a fearless smile, Jio Inzagi—

In the next instant, he kicked the ground and rushed at the royal guard surrounding them.

(...!?)

With a flash of a blade, blood flew and splattered.

In the beginning, Saladia had no idea what had happened.

After a good many seconds, she finally realized Jio Inzagi had manifested a sword spirit in his hand, instantly cutting down one member of the royal guard.

"Hah, hurry and come at me if you wanna die!"



He did not stop moving. One after another, he manifested spirits, slicing his way through the royal guard.

The sight of his fighting method, like a vicious demon, caused Saladia to tremble.

(...Unthinkable, I cannot believe he is using spirits as disposable items!)

From the perspective of an elementalist like Sjora, his method of fighting was completely unacceptable. However, the man's terrifying figure in combat, swinging flashing blades while bathed in splattering blood, seemed strangely attractive.

(...Could this man truly be the Demon King's successor?)

The terrifying picture made Saladia tremble again.

Chapter 5 - Demon's Fist

Part 1

Before dawn. The flying ship carrying Kamito and company, the Revenant, landed in the massive cave of the Demon's Fist which was like a giant hole in the side of the mountain.

Even after entering the Theocracy's airspace, no military ships came to intercept them. This was quite a surprise for Kamito and company. Reports that the border military could not function normally due to civil unrest were evidently true.

Leaving behind Lily, the mechanic Vivian Melosa and the Instructional School twins to stay on the ship, Kamito and the others disembarked.

"After eating that bean curd dish, I feel like I'm breathing fire..."

Sticking out her bright red tongue, Claire commented.

"I never expected it would become this spicy."

"However, the odd thing is how that spiciness compels you to eat nonstop."

"Yes, by the time I realized, everything was finished."

"I, Muir, can't handle too spicy..."

What Claire and the girls were chatting about was Rinslet's specially made spicy dish. Of course, Kamito had a taste too, and indeed, it was so spicy that he felt like spitting fire, but it was incredibly delicious.

Currently back to sword form, Est looked like she had equally enjoyed the bean curd dish cooked in foreign style.

(...That being said, in the end, I still couldn't dig up anything about the Demon King.)

While walking down the gangway ladder, Kamito muttered mentally to himself.

After what happened earlier, Kamito and Claire had browsed through the books on Rubia's shelves, but the information they found were mostly stories with a mythical flavor. As for the forbidden books recorded in High Ancient, even Claire could not fully decipher them.

(Sigh, I guess I'll have to ask Rubia for the details later...)

That was the conclusion he reached.

"—I have been waiting, everyone."

As the group got off the ship, a young girl dressed in a leather combat uniform went up to greet them.

She was named Siska and was one of the Instructional School orphans adopted by Rubia. On their first time boarding the Revenant, she had been the one to lead them to Rubia too.

"I will guide to Master's location. Please follow me —"

After saying that expressionlessly, the girl began to walk inside the massive cave.

Part 2

Led by Siska, Kamito and company advanced through the vast interior of the Demon's Fist.

"Th-This time they won't ask us to take off our underwear or stuff like that, right...?"

"No, I don't think we need to worry about that."

Seeing Claire rub her legs together in worry, Kamito reassured her.

...Or rather, he hoped that Dracunia was one too many countries to have that kind of custom.

"Just so you know, Onii-sama, my panties are striped♪"

Holding Kamito's hand, Muir leaned herself against him.

"M-Muir?"

"W-Wait, what are you doing! Get away from him!"

"No, Onii-sama is mine."

Muir stuck her tongue out at Claire.

"—Please remain silent, you two."

Walking in the lead, Siska turned her head back and expressionlessly warned the two girls.

Inside the base, there was virtually no one. Though both were military strongholds built inside a mountain, this place was completely different from Dracunia's dragon rock fortress that made full use of a natural cavern. Whether the floor or the ceiling, this place was covered with flat and plain rockfaces, giving a claustrophobic feeling.

At that moment, walking beside Kamito, Ellis murmured softly:

"The atmosphere here inexplicably reminds me of the mine at Gado."

"Yeah, definitely..."

The abandoned mine city of Gado in Ordesia was where a strategic-class militarized spirit, Jormungandr, had been sealed and scrapped. For Ellis,

this was also a place of painful memories where she had lost to Jio Inzagi, thus leading to her comrades Rakka and Reishia getting injured.

"Jio Inzagi huh? That guy was rambling something about the Demon King too—"

"Just an impostor."

Hearing that, Claire shrugged.

"Speaking of which, esteemed sister, you were incarcerated with that man at Balsas Prison, right?"

Hearing Ellis' question, Velsaria nodded simply while walking ahead.

"Indeed. In the prison, that man kept insisting he was the Demon King's successor. Naturally, no one paid attention to him—"

Then she murmured as though only remembering now.

"I recall that he escaped when the Cardinal assaulted the prison."

"What!?" "Are you serious, esteemed sister!?"

Claire and Ellis both cried out in surprise.

"Yes. The Cardinal originally planned to recruit him, but he quickly reneged on his promise and fled."

"No way—"

"That woman is unexpectedly naive..."

Hearing that, Muir commented with resignation.

"Hopefully, it won't lead to trouble..."

Jio Inzagi, who styled himself as the Demon King's successor, was particularly obsessed with Kamito, the holder of the Demon King's power. Left alone, there was no telling what Jio would do.

—At that moment...

"Don't worry. I have sealed away all of his memories about Kamito."

Descending lightly along with black feathers, a girl in a dress of darkness appeared out of thin air.

It was Restia, who had remained in her demon sword form until now.

"It would be a problem if he told Ordesia's knights about you and me, right?"

"...Well, that's a relief."

"By the way, Muir Alenstarl —"

Suddenly, Restia's dusk-colored eyes stared at Muir.

"What is it, darkness spirit?"

"Who permitted you to hold Kamito's hand? His right hand is on loan to Miss Sacred Sword, but I do not recall yielding any rights to his left hand to you."

"Shut up. Watch out or I'll use the Jester's Vise to crush you, okay?"

Muir glared back at Restia defiantly.

"H-Hey, you two..."

Seeing a fight about to erupt between the two, Kamito hastily tried to stop them.

For some reason, these two had been on poor terms even during their days at the Instructional School. It even led to frequent fights that damaged the School's stronghold, Cave Castle.

"My oh my, your mouth sure has toughened up, Muir Alenstarl. Yet in the past, you used to be a frequent bedwetter, too scared to venture out to the toilet at night."

Hearing Restia's accusation —

"...!?"

Muir's face gradually turned pale.

"...W-What, d-darkness spirit... w-w-why do you know, that kind of..."

"Fufu, I know everything. Including many other secrets..."

Restia smiled with confidence.

"...Ah, ooh.. N-No, don't believe her, Onii-sama, wetting my bed, no way —"

Tearfully, Muir desperately denied it.

"Uh, yeah, sure..."

Kamito turned his gaze away in response.

In fact, Kamito had washed Muir's soiled sheets and underwear many times in the past, but she had remained blissfully unaware.

"You were a child then, right? I do not think it is anything to be ashamed about."

Did she pity Muir? Ellis comforted her.

"Indeed. Claire was still wetting her bed at the age of nine."

"R-Really?"

"H-Hold on, Rinslet!?"

Never expecting her own secret to be exposed, Claire hastily covered Rinslet's mouth.

"Please be quiet, everyone—"

Siska looked back and said coldly.

Part 3

Kamito and company continued deeper, then got on an elevator device driven by a wind-element spirit crystal.

With a loud noise, the floor underfoot descended. This application of spirit engineering was so cutting-edge that even Areishia Spirit Academy had no such device.

"Where are we going?"

"The assembly venue underground."

Siska answered expressionlessly.

After a while, the strange floating feeling vanished and the elevator's door opened.

In that instant, what entered their view was —

"...!?"

Gathered in a space that resembled a gigantic amphitheater was a crowd, estimated to be thousands in number.

Most of them were old people and children dressed in gray cloaks.

"These people are..."

Just as Kamito was speechless —

"These are the refugees who have been persecuted by Sjora Kahn and have fled to Mordis."

Velsaria spoke while looking at the members of the crowd beneath them, one after another.

"Disorganized rabble, nowhere living up to the name of the 'rebel army'."

"Here, what on earth is Rubia-sama..."

Just as Fianna frowned and expressed her puzzlement...

'—The usurper Sjora Kahn has taken control of the Demon King's capital of Zohar to commit all manner of atrocities. However, her illegitimate reign shall soon crumble and fall!'

A familiar and dignified voice resounded throughout the massive underground cavern.

"N-Nee-sama!?"

Claire cried out in surprise.

Claire's gaze was directed at her figure, standing in the center of the gathered crowd.

A princess maiden wearing a demon's mask, her long crimson hair fluttering behind her, looking as though it were burning.

Dressed in ritual attire of pure white, it was none other than Rubia Elstein.

'—The long-anticipated moment has arrived! Tonight, at this Demon's Fist, let us welcome the resurrection of the true Demon King whom we have waited for a thousand years!'

Yeahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Like raging waves, the crowd's deafening cheering shook the giant underground cavern.

'—Now is the time to pray for the Demon King's return, oppressed believers of the Demon King cult!'

Demon King! Demon King! Demon King! Demon King! Demon King!
Demon King! Demon King! Demon King!

Wave after wave, the fervent cheering resounded throughout the rocky mountain of Mordis.

"...W-What is she talking about?"

...Kamito and company could only stand there stunned, watching the scene below.

Part 4

After Rubia's rousing speech, the gathering of Demon King cultists was dismissed—

Kamito and company were taken to a level below the great cavern, a hall similar to a conference room.

According to Siska, who left immediately after leading Kamito's group to the place, it had been used as a headquarters for army staff during the Ranbal War.

Covered by solid walls of rock, the hall was not only extremely soundproofed but also had isolation magic carved to block infiltration from espionage-type militarized spirits.

Kamito and company sat down at the long table in the center and waited for Rubia to arrive.

Restia turned back into the demon sword to standby, whereas Muir simply took a nap, hunched over the table. The ability to enter sleep swiftly no matter where was a skill shared by everyone trained at the Instructional School.

"What is Nee-sama planning...?"

Claire murmured worriedly to herself.

...Well, one could hardly blame her for worrying. The Rubia delivering the speech earlier was truly quite different from the Rubia they knew.

"...She was apparently talking about the Demon King's resurrection. What on earth did she mean?"

"The refugees gathered here are all Demon King cultists persecuted by Sjora Kahn as heretics. The Cardinal intends to rouse their faith and loyalty, I expect."

Velsaria offered her own interpretation.

"Then talk of the Demon King's resurrection is just misdirection...?"

"Perhaps—"

With her chin resting on her fingers, Fianna spoke ambiguously.

"By using Soul Recall magic, for example, the Demon King really could be revived or some such—"

Hearing her quiet murmurs, Kamito suddenly came to a realization.

(...Speaking of which, Rubia had awakened Nepenthes Lore before.)

Thinking back now, it seemed a long time ago, but it had happened during the preliminary round of the Blade Dance.

At the time, she had used the taboo spell of Soul Recall to revive Nepenthes Lore, a monster that had inherited the Demon King's power. Essentially a failed Demon King specimen, the monster singlehandedly destroyed Milla Bassett's team belonging to the Principality of Rossvale and utterly demolished Team Scarlet's base.

"However, even for Rubia-sama, resurrecting the Demon King himself would be absolutely impossible."

"Indeed, no one even knows where the Demon King's remains vanished to."

"Yes, I know, but this is just speculation—"

Fianna shrugged and shook her head. At that moment...

"—Thank you for waiting."

The door to the hall opened and Rubia appeared.

"...!"

Everyone present all looked towards Rubia.

She had taken off the princess maiden attire from just now and changed to the Theocracy's military uniform.

The demon mask was also removed to reveal her true face.

Sitting at the head of the table, Rubia swept her gaze over everyone's face in turn, then slowly began to speak.

"First of all, I apologize for being unable to meet up in Dracunia. During the past few days, the situation in the Theocracy has changed dramatically. Consequently, it became essential to take control of this city ahead of schedule—"

"From what we saw earlier, looks like you succeeded."

Kamito remarked at this time.

"Yes, I have already reached an agreement with the Demon King cult cadre leading the refugees. In exchange for rescuing Saladia Kahn, they have pledged to enter an alliance with Legitimate Ordesia."

"...Nothing less expected from you."

While feeling impressed inside, Kamito stared sharply at Rubia.

"—However, fabricating false hope with lies about the Demon King's resurrection, that's a bit much."

He voiced the doubts that had been occupying his heart since earlier.

The numerous refugees were all mesmerized by Rubia's speech.

They believed from the bottom of their hearts that their savior, the Demon King, was going to resurrect.

He was quite displeased with Rubia's methods in exploiting other people's faith, even for the sake of winning over the rebel army.

From what he could tell, Claire and the girls felt similarly.

However, Rubia took on Kamito's gaze directly—

"I had no intention of fabricating false hope."

Then she said that.

"...?"

Kamito looked at her in surprise.

"Don't tell me you're really gonna revive Demon King Solomon?"

"No—"

Rubia shook her head and slowly declared:

"—*The Demon King is already here.*"

"...Huh?"

Everyone present began to doubt what they had heard.

Chapter 6 - The Imposter Demon King

Part 1

—*The Demon King is already here.*

Kamito soon understood the meaning behind Rubia's words.

"...So what the heck is that?"

Seeing *that* carried to the table by Siska—

Kamito narrowed his eyes and asked Rubia.

A crimson cloak in the color of blood with shoulder pads featuring countless spikes.

Pitch-black armor engraved with designs of demonic beasts. A staff shaped like intertwined snakes. Finally, there was an eerie skull mask whose eye sockets were fitted with crimson spirit crystals.

"Do I need to explain?"

"...Yeah, just in case—"

Holding his temples, Kamito groaned.

...However, he could already guess pretty much what this was about without needing to hear her answer.

"Kazehaya Kamito, you will be the Demon King."

"I refuse."

Kamito immediately replied.

(...I knew it, isn't this exactly what I predicted!?)

However, Rubia remained unfazed and continued.

"What are you unhappy about? Is it the mask's design?"

"No. Well, that's part of it... But that's not the issue. Wait a sec, don't tell me you created the whole outfit?"

"That is neither here nor there. In that case, what are you unhappy about?"

"...Everything. Why the heck do I have to be the Demon King!?"

Kamito protested strongly.

"Indeed, Kamito-kun is already the Demon King of the Night." "Right, by this point..." "I agree." "Hmm, Kamito is already a Demon King, right?"

Despite hearing these comments behind him, Kamito was determined to ignore them.

"Because it is the most effective method to unite the refugees."

Rubia declared coldly.

"...!"

"Persecuted by Sjora Kahn, banished by their home country, these believers of the Demon King cult have gathered at this Demon's Fist. Sooner or later, in the near future, they will rise up against Sjora. However, the Demon King cult is not a monolithic entity. Uniting the rabble requires establishing a symbol that everyone approves, the Demon King—"

"...But that means creating an impostor Demon King to deceive them, right?"

Saying that, Kamito glared sharply at Rubia.

"Like Demon King Solomon, you hold the power of the Darkness Elemental Lord within you. This is the genuine truth."

"That's mincing words. I'm not Demon King Solomon. Okay, suppose I concede that it's necessary for a symbol to unite the refugees, then why don't you take on that job? Like how you pretended to be Ren Ashbell at the Blade Dance."

Kamito responded mockingly.

"The cultists will not accept the Demon King unless it is you, a male elementalist."

"Well—"

Just as Kamito was about to launch a rebuttal—

He suddenly noticed something and closed his mouth.

He saw faint wavering in Rubia's eyes that were gazing directly at him.

"Kazehaya Kamito, did you see the astounding number of people in the crowd? Exiled by their home country, persecuted, these people—"

"Yeah..."

"These people have lost everything. Not just land and wealth but also the hope to live. Right now, what they need is a savior."

"I get the logic, but..."

"I am not asking for you to rule these people as the Demon King. All that is required is to spread news that the Demon King has been resurrected here. Even if it is false, so long as there is a shred of hope, people will be able to live on—"

At this moment, Kamito finally figured out the wavering emotions in Rubia's eyes.

(...I see now. So *that* is what she honestly feels.)

She was seeing in these refugees a shadow of the Elstein subjects whose homeland had been incinerated by the Fire Elemental Lord's calamity. Back then, even as the Fire Queen, she had failed to save huge numbers of people, which was why she blamed herself deeply even to this present day.

Kamito remained silent, thinking back to that huge crowd.

They believed deeply in what Rubia said about the Demon King resurrecting.

It was not simply because they were believers of the Demon King cult. At the same time, they must have felt the poignant emotion in the words of Rubia's speech.

"..."

Sighing deeply, Kamito—

"...All I have to do is play the Demon King in front of the refugees, right?"

He spoke.

"Kamito!?"

He heard Claire exclaim behind him.

"Indeed, nothing more."

Rubia took on Kamito's gaze and nodded.

"...Fine."

Hence, Kamito took the Demon King's mask and said:

"—Just this once. This time, I'll be the Demon King."

Part 2

—Thus it came to be.

Although Kamito had agreed to play the role of the Demon King—

"Kamito-kun, do your best at playing the Demon King."

"Since you act like a real Demon King every now and then, surely it will be fine."

"Hmm, I think all you need to do is behave as usual."

"Just act natural, Kamito."

"...What the heck does that mean?"

Carrying the Demon King outfit in his arms, Kamito narrowed his eyes and retorted.

...Looking at the creepy skull mask, thoughts of regret were surging in his heart, though a little too late.

To Claire and the girls who were acting like they were uninvolved, Rubia said:

"Do not jump to the conclusion that this has nothing to do with you. I have prepared roles for you all."

"...Huh?"

Claire and the girls instantly froze, looking at one another.

"...U-Us too?"

"Indeed. You four will play the Demon King's concubines."

Hearing Rubia's sudden words—

"Ehhhhhhhhhh!"

Claire and the girls cried out.

"Rubia-sama, w-what do you mean by that?"

"According to legends, Demon King Solomon was served by numerous concubines. With the four of you present, the Demon King's resurrection would become more convincing, of course."

Rubia replied to Fianna's question without any change in expression.

...Indeed, Kamito had seen a history book from Rubia's study which recorded how Demon King Solomon was served by a huge number of concubines, even including illustrations of all kinds of unmentionable poses.

Perhaps recalling the book she had seen in the flying ship, Claire's face went red instantly.

"Wait, isn't that clearly unacceptable!?"

Kamito hastily objected. These were noble young ladies with plenty of self-respect. Even if playing a role, asking them to act as the Demon King's concubines would be totally unacceptable—

"N-No helping it..." "No other way." "Hmm, indeed, the Demon King's concubines are necessary roles." "Yes, authenticity is very important."

...Huh? Why does it feel like all of them were fairly motivated...

Rubia nodded briefly then said:

"There are four outfits, already prepared in each of your respective rooms. Go get changed."

"H-Hey..."

Despite Kamito's objections, Claire and the girls were completely compliant.

At this moment, a light cough was heard from a corner of the room.

Kamito looked, only to see Velsaria's ice-blue eyes glaring coldly at Rubia.

"What is the matter, Velsaria Eva?"

Yes, Kamito raised his hopes.

Given Velsaria's straitlaced personality, surely she would object.

However, what she said turned out to be—

"Uh, are my services not required...?"

Unexpected words.

"What, Velsaria!?"

Kamito could not help but exclaim.

...Indeed, what Rubia had said just now was "you four."

In other words, the Demon King's concubines did not include Muir or Velsaria.

Was there some kind of age restriction—

"Velsaria Eva, do you wish to become the Demon King's concubine too?"

"...O-Of course not!"

Hearing Rubia's question, Velsaria shook her head vigorously.

"I-I merely seek confirmation. As a knight of the Fahrengart family, how could I possibly engage in such shameless behavior, even as an act?"

"Uh, my esteemed sister, I disagree on finding this shameless..."

Ellis protested in a small voice.

"Velsaria, you will undergo adjustments from Vivian Melosa at this Demon's Fist facility. The Revenant is not sufficiently equipped for complete fine-tuning, but since this place is a military facility, that woman ought to succeed in stabilizing Juggernaut's output."

"...I-Is that so? Understood."

Recovering her usual glacier-like expression, Velsaria nodded.

...Kamito wondered if he was imagining the faint disappointment he heard in her voice.

Then Rubia walked over to Muir who was sleeping, hunched over the table.

"Muir Alenstarl —"

She grabbed her by the back collar.

"...Uwah? W-What?"

Sleeping soundly, Muir suddenly woke up and glared at Rubia.

"Wait, what are you doing?"

"I have a special mission for you and Lily. Go scout out the Theocracy's capital of Zohar and locate Saladia Kahn's whereabouts."

"Ehhh, another scouting mission? I still wanna play with Onii-sama more..."

Hearing that, Muir pouted unhappily.

"Why do you think I brought you two back from the Holy Kingdom? The success of the Saladia rescue mission depends on your results."

"...O-Owwwwww, got it, got it. Stop grinding my temple with your fist!"

Muir cried out with tears in her eyes... It looked quite painful.

"That's Nee-sama's killer move. She used it on me once when I was small."

Sitting next to Kamito, Claire explained quietly with cold sweat breaking out on her forehead.

"Heh, so you had sister quarrels?"

"Yes, because my sister was carefully growing a peach tree but I accidentally turned it into charcoal."

"...Then you were the one at fault."

Released by Rubia, Muir walked unsteadily over to Kamito and said:

"Onii-sama, I'll be back soon. Let's play when I'm back."

"Yeah, take care."

Kamito placed his hand on Muir's hand and petted her lightly.

"Huah, Onii-sama..."

Muir closed her eyes partially in bliss then walked out of the conference room.

"Now then, the Resurrection Ceremony will take place this afternoon. Please make sure you are prepared before then."

The meeting concluded with Rubia's solemn declaration.

Part 3

After going separate ways from Claire and the girls, Kamito was taken to a military officer's suite located one floor above the conference room.

Even though it was an officer's suite, having remained unused for so long, it had become more like a storeroom.

(...Oh man, do I have to change into this outfit?)

Sighing, Kamito hung up his Academy uniform in the closet of this dust-covered room, changing into the pitch-black armor that was engraved with demonic beasts.

He then put on the blood-red cloak and the spike-tipped boots.

Finally, he covered his face with the creepy skull mask.

(I expected my view to be blocked, but visibility is surprisingly good...)

Spirit crystals glowing red had been installed into the skull's eyes and apparently enchanted with Night Vision magic allowing him to see clearly in dark conditions. Furthermore, the armor worn under the cloak also felt lighter than expected, not uncomfortable at all.

(...Next, I guess this is my "script.")

Kamito tossed a bound pile of paper onto the table.

The script was prepared by Rubia. She had apparently collated Demon King Solomon's actual quotes, based on historical sources in the field of Demon King studies.

(I just feel that those historical sources made stuff up...)

With skepticism, Kamito opened the script.

"Uh, I am Solomon the Demon King, awakened after the passage of a millennium—"

Just as he read out the words on the first page, in that instant...

The mouth section of the mask suddenly discharged black smoke.

"...W-What the heck is this!?"

Kamito frantically took off the mask.

The skull mask hit the floor and bounced, spewing smoke while spinning.

"...So it had this kind of design."

Kamito muttered in exasperation. Just then...

"Fufu, it suits you quite well, Kamito... Fu, fufu, fufufu..."

"...!?"

He looked back, only to see that Restia had returned to human form without him noticing, laughing adorably while rolling on the bed, her wings shaking.

"...C-Come on... I'm putting in a serious effort here."

When Kamito protested with displeasure...

"Fufu, I'm sorry. Still, that appearance is to blame for being too weird —"

"...I-Is it that weird? From what I saw in the books in Rubia's study, the Demon King's appearance was pretty much along these lines."

Despite minor differences, the Demon King's image was essentially portrayed like this.

"Indeed, he was frequently clad in that blood-red cloak. However, he neither wore that kind of skull mask nor spewed smoke —"

Restia giggled on the bed.

(...!?)

In that instant...

Kamito finally noticed something important.

(...! Oh right, Restia was the Demon King's—)

Indeed, Restia once held the title of the Demon King's Sword. That was why those old men at the Instructional School assigned her to educate Kamito, the Demon King's successor.

—Why did I fail to notice this until now?

Compared to checking history books, he should have done something first.

Clearly, she was the authority on information about the Demon King—

Kamito took a deep breath and...

"Say, Restia—"

He started the conversation.

"What is it, Kamito?"

"Can you tell me about Demon King Solomon?"

Hearing that, sitting on the bed, Restia tilted her head.

"...Why do you want to know about him?"

Her dusk-colored eyes stared straight at Kamito.

Kamito could not help but avoid eye contact.

"...That's, just for reference, because I'm going to play the Demon King next—"

His answer sounded like an excuse.

Yes, it was an excuse. His interest in the Demon King from a thousand years ago was genuine, but not limited to that. To be honest, he was a bit curious about the man who had used her in the past as he had done.

(...Sheesh, what is with this childish competitiveness?)

Kamito mocked himself wryly in his own thoughts. Perhaps, this subconscious jealousy was what prevented him from choosing to ask her directly about the Demon King.

Kamito did not know if Restia read his mind, but—

She chuckled and...

"—Yes. Of course, I might know a few more details than human history books, but actually, I didn't know him extremely well."

"...Huh?"

Hearing the unexpected answer, Kamito could not help but ask:

"But didn't those people at the Instructional School call you the Demon King's Sword—"

"Yes, I was indeed used by the Demon King. However, that man merely used me as a powerful tool instead of a *contracted spirit*."

"...Not as a contracted spirit?"

Kamito doubted his ears.

"Yes, that's right—"

Restia nodded.

"I was not the Demon King's contracted spirit. No, and not just me either. Legends speak of the seventy-two spirits under his command, but in reality,

he did not enter into spirit contracts with them. He simply used Ren Ashdoll's power to dominate them, that's all —"

"...Is that what happened?"

This was definitely a fact that no history book had recorded.

In a way, it might be similar to how Jio Inzagi had used a Bloodstone to control spirits. Of course, the Demon King's case was on a completely different scale —

Kamito's gaze suddenly fell upon the spirit seal on his left hand.

(...I see. She didn't enter a spirit contract, huh?)

While feeling surprised by what she revealed, Kamito also felt strangely reassured.

"Fufu, what's the matter, Kamito?"

Restia chuckled and peered to inspect Kamito's expression.

"...Oh, no, uh —"

Kamito hastily shook his head.

"But Restia, weren't you responsible for the mission of guiding the Demon King's awakening?"

He brought up the question that had surfaced in his mind.

The original mission of Restia Ashdoll the darkness spirit was to promote the awakening of the human incarnation of Ren Ashdoll's reborn power, guiding him to become the assassin to eliminate the insane Elemental Lords.

If Demon King Solomon only used her as a simple tool, then what about her mission —?

"...There was nothing I could do. He did not heed my words at all."

Restia shrugged and shook her head.

"From the moment I was unsealed, he only used me as a weapon and refused any kind of interaction. He wielded my power according to his own will to vanquish countless spirits—"

"...In that case, Demon King Solomon's aggressive conquest of the continent was not because he was controlled by the will of Ren Ashdoll."

"All along, Ren Ashdoll's objective is to destroy the Elemental Lords."

Pausing a little, Restia continued.

"Starting the Demon King War was his own idea. I have no idea what considerations went through his mind to start that war. The Demon King never bared his thoughts and feelings to spirits. If anyone ever understood that man's heart, most likely it would be *her*—"

Staring off into the distance, Restia whispered.

"...Her?"

"The one and only spirit who won his trust and contracted with Demon King Solomon."

"There was a spirit like that?"

"Yes. However, legends say that spirit was laid to rest together with the Demon King. Inside the Pyramid somewhere unknown in the desert—"

With nostalgia in her eyes, Restia murmured.

Part 4

At a military facility underground, deep beneath Scorpia, a place known as the "sealed territory" —

Sjora Kahn and her trusted follower Valmira had spent the last few days here.

On the wall of this tetrahedral space was a gigantic magic circle written using High Ancient.

As the name "sealed territory" implied, this was a place isolated using a sturdy door and countless barriers. A dangerous being requiring such drastic measures was currently sealed beneath.

—Leviathan, the city spirit.

In compliance with the treaty at the conclusion of the Ranbal War, it was one of the seven *strategic-class militarized spirits* sealed and scrapped by various countries. According to official records, during the first battle it was deployed in, this spirit had destroyed an entire city in a small nation within merely seventeen hours.

This space was the magic device for controlling Leviathan. At the same time, this was the historical site of the Demon's Circuit, created by the Demon King a thousand years ago.

Wearing a Demon King cultist mask, Sjora's trusted princess maiden Valmira reported:

"Preparations to connect to Leviathan are complete. Operation in and of itself is fine."

But after a brief pause, she continued.

"What is it?"

"There are control issues. If the seal is lifted as-is, Leviathan will most likely go on a rampage."

"...Hmm, now that would be a problem."

Resting her chin on her hand, Sjora seemed to contemplate.

"How long will adjustments take?"

"Half a month or so, by estimates—"

"Is that so? Then there is no helping it—"

Sjora sighed with disappointment then...

"In that case, activate it under imperfect conditions."

"...!?"

Faced with her monarch's nonchalant but terrifying declaration, Valmira was speechless.

"F-Forgive me for being forward, Lady Hierarch, but suppose Leviathan were to be activated in this current state, there will be thousands, no, tens of thousands of casualties in the city of Zohar, the populace will become sacrifices—"

Normal operation of a strategic-class militarized spirit required a team of well-trained elementalists to conduct a large-scale ritual over multiple days. If control was lost, the militarized spirit would indiscriminately steal divine power from around it before finally collapsing itself.

However—

"—So what?"

Curling her crimson lips, Sjora sneered.

"...Sjora... -sama...?"

Valmira's entire body trembled.

Originally, dozens of princess maidens, already prepared to give up their lives, had been arranged as sacrifices —

However, Sjora was planning to sacrifice all of Zohar.

This was not a normal person's mindset. If something like that was done, the Theocracy itself would collapse even if the rebel army gathered at the Demon's Fist could be eliminated.

"...I implore you... Please reconsider, Sjora-sama!"

Valmira, the princess maiden who had served Sjora since childhood knelt on the ground and pleaded.

However, Sjora Kahn laughed mockingly.

"Whether the people or this country, none of that matters *to us* —"

"...!?"

Valmira looked up forcefully and frowned.

The voice coming from Sjora's lips sounded like multiple old men talking at the same time. Very weird.

"Sjora-sama, you... No, who on earth are you —"

Valmira swiftly leaped backwards and faced off against her monarch.

Her instincts as a princess maiden informed her.

Sjora Kahn had been possessed by something ominous —

Valmira instantly made a hand sign and prepared to chant exorcism magic.

However—

"Foolish—"

"...Ah, guh...!"

Sjora Kahn drew a circle with her finger—

Instantly, a pattern resembling a coiled snake appeared on the girl's neck.

"...Hu, guh... Guh, o-ooh..."

The pattern gradually took root, constricting Valmira's slender neck tightly.

Groaning in pain, she struggled violently—

Finally, she tragically breathed her last breath.

"—You are the first sacrifice. Feel honored."

Sjora Kahn—or rather, the people possessing her spoke quietly. Despite having just killed the retainer who had followed her since childhood, she was showing a terrifying smile on her face.

—At that very moment.

"What a poor dear. You used to love her so much, right?"

In this space where no one else was supposed to be present except for Sjora Kahn and Valmira's corpse, a girl's adorable voice was suddenly heard.

What method had been used to invade this "sealed territory"?

Sjora looked back to see *that* standing there without anyone noticing.

Vestments of pure white, symbolizing law and order. Glittering golden hair.

The right eye was beautiful and violet. The left eye was covered by an eye patch.

She was none other than Millennia Sanctus, a cardinal of the Holy Kingdom.

"You sure can appear anywhere —"

"Indeed, the omnipresence of light is precisely my attribute."

Millennia Sanctus chuckled then used her hands to gesture at the deceased Valmira, making the Holy Kingdom's sign to pray for the dead to rest in peace.

"The assassination of the Dragon King apparently failed."

"It has no effect on my lord's plan. *On the other hand, losing one of me was a painful price to pay —*"

"Oh, plan?"

Sjora Kahn whispered, quite interested.

"None of your business, Sjora — no, I suppose I ought to call you Lord Hierarch here?"

"Either is fine. A mere title holds no meaning for us by this juncture."

The witch's crimson eyes glowed faintly.

During the Blade Dance at Ragna Ys, what had possessed Sjora Kahn was —

A being that could be described as the conglomeration of grudge and obsession from unbroken generations of Demon King cult hierarchs since antiquity. Using unorthodox and secret techniques passed down the cult, they repeatedly reincarnated themselves into the princess maidens of royal blood, engaging in clandestine machinations under the shadows of history.

Their ultimate goal was to obtain the Demon King's power —

A thousand years ago, they had failed. However, now that someone inheriting the Demon King's power had appeared, these ghosts were now restless to devour that power and claim it as their own.

"So, Lady Millennia, have you obtained the *coffin* lying dormant in the Pyramid?"

She spoke in a gloomy voice that sounded like multiple people talking at the same time.

"Lurie is in the process of retrieval. However, it is impossible in the near term."

Millennia shook her head.

"As expected of the Sacred Maiden's seal. Obtaining the Demon Slayer at the Academy would have saved plenty of trouble —"

"Hasten the retrieval. Once the *coffin* is obtained, our objective would be half complete."

"Yes, I know. Do everything you can to plunge the continent into chaos."

"There is no need to remind me of that."

The people possessing Sjora's body spoke with resentment.

The objectives of Millennia Sanctus and the organization of Des Esseintes behind her were still unknown.

Her assistance to the Theocracy did not seem like she was seeking some kind of benefit. It was as though using this opportunity to create chaos on the continent was in itself her goal —

However, the Holy Kingdom's objectives did not matter to them at all.

So long as their interests were aligned, exploitation was possible —

Sjora Kahn released a droplet of blood on the magic circle written in High Ancient.

"—I expect this Leviathan to bring the result you desire."

Chapter 7 - The Resurrected Demon King

Part 1

In the end, after listening to Restia, Kamito still knew little about the Demon King—

Anyway, costumed as the Demon King, Kamito made his way to the conference room of the moored Revenant in order to practice before the real event.

Probably because girls took longer to dress up, none of the others were at the conference room yet.

(...Can't be helped. I guess I'll practice on my own until everyone gathers here.)

Kamito took out a scrunched up script.

"I am the Demon King, I am the Demon King... I am the Demon King who rules the world..."

While pacing about the room, he began muttering quietly to himself.

"Whether wealth, women or spirits, everything in this world belongs to me. K-Kuhahahahaha...!"

Monotonous reading of the script and dry laughter sounded hollowly.

(...Did Demon King Solomon really say these things?)

While perspiration broke out on his forehead, Kamito cocked his head. Sigh, indeed, the image of the Demon King circulating in folklore was pretty much in this style—

"All who oppose me shall die, gahahahahahaha... Ha... Hey, what the hell...?"

Exasperated, Kamito was just about to throw away Rubia's script when...

"Kamito, have you memorized the lines?"

Suddenly, someone spoke to him.

He suddenly looked at where the voice was coming from.

"...Cl... aire!?"

Under the skull mask, Kamito's eyes widened until they were round.

Claire's appearance was akin to being half naked.

She was dressed in a sheer garment offering a translucent view of her skin with a jeweled dress that was almost underwear. The exquisitely embroidered sarong featured an audacious slit, exposing her healthy thigh. The exotic and sexy attire was very much like the illustrations of the Demon King's concubines they had seen in Rubia's study.

Confronted with Claire's shocking appearance, dressed in a manner she would never normally accept—

"Y-Your outfit..."

Kamito could not help but feel his heart pounding.

"...~I-I know, q-quit staring!"

Blushing to her ears, Claire covered up her small bosom with her arms and glared at Kamito unhappily.

...Dressed in a skimpy outfit, awkwardly rubbing her knees together, she looked amazingly cute.

Kamito hastily shook his head.

"...No, uh, although I'm very surprised, it seems very, pretty..."

He offered his honest opinion.

"...Huaah, sh-sheesh, what are you talking about..."

Claire got more and more embarrassed, her entire face turning bright red. Then...

"Y-You, on the other hand, look terrible in that Demon King outfit..."

As though trying to hide her embarrassment, Claire raised her head and commented with a glance.

"I don't think anyone'd look good in this outfit."

"...Fair enough."

Claire shrugged. Still covering her chest with her arms, she entered the room.

...Wearing such an outfit, even walking felt very disgraceful.

"...S-So, are you okay with the lines?"

"Well, it isn't a lot, so I should be fine—"

Compared to memorizing the Instructional School's passwords, it was much easier.

That being said, because there were many lines that Kamito would never speak normally, practicing until he could speak them naturally would take quite a bit of time—

"Are you okay on your end?"

"Who do you take me for? I am number one in the year, you know?"

"...I guess you're right. Th-Then, wanna try practicing together?"

"S-Sure, no problem..."

Claire nodded, held her script and stood face to face with Kamito.

"Th-This makes me feel a bit nervous..."

"Me too..."

Claire coughed lightly and directed her gaze to the script.

Then—

"I-I am the Demon King's loyal servant. This body and this mind, everything is yours."

...Totally monotone. Even as an honors student, it looked like she needed to work on her acting skills quite a bit.

"O-Okay, your turn—"

"Y-Yeah..."

Kamito hastily flipped open his script.

"Yes, you are mine. Offer your heart and your body, everything to me—"

"U-Uh... O-Okay!"

When he read out the line, Claire nodded obediently.

"...? Wait, you messed up there, didn't you? That part should be answered with 'my power as a princess maiden shall surely aid in your ambitions, O great Demon King'—Right?"

"...Oh, y-you, y-you're right!"

Claire went bright red in the face, speaking in a fluster.

...Was she nervous? She seemed to be in poor form.

At that moment—

"Oh my, so you two have started practicing already —"

Ellis, Fianna and Rinslet entered the room.

"...!?"

Kamito felt his heart rate rise again.

Changed into the highly revealing outfits of the Demon King's concubines, each and every one of them looked very pretty, giving off an allure completely different from usual.

On further thought, the girls of Team Scarlet were striking beauties who stood out from among the students of Areishia Spirit Academy, a gathering of beautiful girls to begin with.

Adding the fact that they were dressed in such racy costumes, an accelerating heart rate was unavoidable.

"Kamito-kun, h-how are our clothes?"

"K-Kamito, uh, quit staring..."

"Yes, it f-feels very embarrassing to be ogled like this..."

Looking at each other in embarrassment, they awkwardly rubbed their exposed legs together.

"S-Sorry..."

Kamito frantically shifted his gaze away.

"Uh, girls, are you okay with the lines?"

"Of course."

"Hmm, I have memorized everything."

"Fufu, a perfect actress such as I have no need for a script. I will have you know that I once played the main role for a drama performance dedicated as an offering to spirits."

Saying that, Rinslet tossed her hair.

"Rinslet, it'd be pointless if you ended up stealing the Demon King's show."

"I-I know that."

Rinslet pouted.

"Okay, let's start rehearsing—"

"Yes."

Kamito and the girls gathered in the center of the room and started practicing. However, drawn to their attractive appearances, Kamito could not focus his concentration at all—

Part 2

—Night fell upon the Demon's Fist.

At a subterranean drill ground, the size of the crowd gathered had surpassed thousands of people.

Everyone was here to catch a glimpse of the Demon King who was predicted to resurrect here tonight.

For them, the Demon King's resurrection would be hope beyond dispute.

At the center of this fervor—

Dressed in ritual attire, Rubia Elstein was giving a speech.

"—Tonight, Demon King Solomon shall awaken from his thousand-year-long slumber, to resurrect right beside you believers of the legitimate Demon King—"

Demon King! Demon King! Demon King! Demon King! Demon King!
Demon King! Demon King!

The crowd, occupying the whole drill ground, cheered loudly, shaking the entire Demon's Fist.

"Kamito, time for you to make an entrance—"

"Y-Yeah..."

Hearing Claire's quiet reminder, Kamito nodded a little nervously under his Demon King costume.

They were currently in an underground passage beneath the drill ground. Vast passages had been built during the Ranbal War era, extending like a spider's web inside the Demon's Fist. The passages connected various parts of the Demon's Fist and were used to transport supplies and soldiers. The plan was for Kamito and the girls to appear at the drill ground where the crowd was once Rubia's speech ended.

"I can't help feeling nervous..."

Kamito muttered under his mask.

"Kamito-kun, just act your normal self and you will be fine."

"What normal self..."

"Q-Quiet, the speech is over—"

Just as Claire gave a reminder...

"—Now then, let the Demon King Resurrection Ritual begin!"

Rubia's voice was heard. She began chanting an incantation to revive the Demon King.

With this as the signal, the elevator carrying Kamito and company began to rise slowly.

The incantation was the same as what she had chanted to resurrect Nepenthes Lore previously, but since no one present was capable of understanding the High Ancient mastered by Queens, this was probably not a problem.

The gigantic magic circle drawn on the ground began to glow ominously. The flames of a bonfire surged dramatically.

Then amid the crimson blaze, the Demon King clad in a blood-red cloak made his appearance.

Crimson eyes glowed with radiant light under the skull mask.

In his hand was a staff in the form of intertwined snakes, a terrifying demon bird perched on his shoulder.

Waiting on him by his feet were four beautiful princesses with cold gazes.

The crowd, thousands strong, instantly clamored.

"Are you the ones who roused me from my thousand-year-long slumber—"

Landing on the ground, Kamito looked down at the crowd prostrated at his feet and spoke.

Through the effects of wind magic, his voice sounded especially loud and clear.

"We have waited long for you, O Demon King—"

Kneeling in front of Kamito like the others, Rubia reverently lowered her head.

"Princess maiden, why disturb my sleep?"

"I implore you to destroy the Theocracy's usurper—"

Still maintaining her kneeling posture, Rubia answered.

"Hmph, usurper huh? So pests have risen up in my absence."

Kamito growled and the skull mask discharged black smoke.

"Naturally, this is my country. I shall not allow anyone to do with it as they please—"

At Kamito's declaration—

Massive cheering erupted at the drill ground again.

"I shall grant ye victory—"

YEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

Coordinating with the timing of Kamito brandishing his staff, Claire and the girls stood up.

"My crimson flames shall sweep across the world to bring forth its demise!"

"My fierce wind shall blow away Zohar's army—"

"My dark knight shall make blood sacrifices out of the enemy!"

"Darkness shall flood the entire world, ohohoho!"

Although Claire and Ellis recited their lines monotonously, Rinslet seemed to have flipped some kind of weird switch inside her — Sigh, at least it was a passing performance.

Glaring at the crowd, Kamito shouted:

"I shall crush all enemies and take back the capital!"

Demon King! Demon King! Demon King! Demon King! Demon King!
Demon King!

The crowd's excitement reached a climax, but at that very moment...

A massive explosion erupted at the drill ground.

Part 3

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Suddenly, accompanied by a flash of light, an explosion was heard, almost rupturing their eardrums.

(...W-What's going on!?)

Amid the rising dust cloud, Kamito instantly reacted and checked out his surroundings.

Kamito had a pretty good idea what the flash of light prior to the explosion in the crowd was about.

(The light of releasing a spirit—)

As expected, ahead of him, a xenomorphic shadow appeared in the dust cloud. Once the dust settled, a giant monster with a lion's body, an extra goat's head and a snake for a tail could be seen there.

"...That's the Chimera-type militarized spirit!?"

Claire cried out in shock.

The magic beast spirit, the Chimera, was an obsolete tactical-class militarized spirit deployed on the front lines during the Ranbal War. Even though it was two generations older than the current Glasya-Labolas giant spirit deployed in the official ranks of various nations' military forces, in terms of combat ability, it was Glasya-Labolas' equal.

"...W-Why is a militarized spirit—"

"Who knows..."

Kamito readied the Demon Slayer and the Vorpall Sword in both hands and faced off against the magic beast.

Gathered on the plaza, the crowd still had yet to grasp the situation.

Confronted with the suddenly appeared militarized spirit, they simply froze on the spot.

"Claire, direct the people to evacuate—"

—Just as Kamito shouted...

Guooooooooooooooooooooo!

The magic beast roared and swung its huge limbs.

"...!?"

Kamito and Claire instantly jumped to the left and the right respectively, dodging the attack.

With a thunderous crash, stone tiles were dug up, a large amount of debris flew into the air.

(...What astounding destructive power!?)

Rolling on the ground, Kamito cursed in his thoughts. A mere human body would be shredded by a direct hit from that.

The countless shards of broken tiles were about to rain down on the crowd—

(...Tsk, damn it!)

Kamito could not help but click his tongue. At that moment...

"—Freezing fangs of ice, go forth and pierce—Freezing Arrow!" "

Rinslet fired arrows that pierced the giant debris with pinpoint accuracy—

"O wind, sweep away—Wind Bombs!"

The small fragments were swept away by Ellis' wind magic.

"We will take care of this, hurry and head to somewhere safe!"

Ellis shouted loudly at the crowd.

"Over here, hurry. Into the barrier!"

The crowd swarmed into the defensive barrier set up by Fianna.

Wearing a fluttering bright red cloak, Kamito landed on the ground and started to search for a presence mixed in the crowd.

(The elementalists who released the militarized spirit should be nearby—)

Suddenly, in the chaotic plaza, Kamito noticed a sharp aura of murderous intent.

It was almost instinct.

Faced with the knife flying through the darkness, Kamito deflected it using his Demon Slayer—

Then using the Vorpall Sword, he chopped down the other knife flying from a different direction.

(...The first knife was a diversion huh? And the blades are painted black too.)

The work of trained professional assassins, undoubtedly.

(Probably assassins from the Theocracy —)

Despite the Night Vision effect, the Demon King's mask was still quite detrimental to his field of view. Kamito groaned.

This was an assassination targeting Rubia, probably. He never expected a militarized spirit would be sent —

(...Oh right, what about Rubia!?)

Kamito realized in sudden alarm and turned his gaze around him

Soon, he found her.

She had collapsed under the rubble.

Perhaps blown away by the earlier impact. She also seemed to be bleeding from the forehead.

Although she had been able to fight Kamito equally during the Blade Dance —

That was purely because she had summoned the Sacred Maiden's power into her physical body and also formed a contract with the ultimate flame spirit Laevateinn. No matter how high her abilities as a princess maiden, her physical stats should be similar to Fianna's.

"Rubia —"

Kamito frantically tried to hurry over. At that instant...

Two figures dressed in gray hoods rushed over from the scattering crowd.
(...!)

Kamito released divine power and kicked the ground hard.

This was an application of the Absolute Blade Art of divine speed, Purple Lightning. Kamito's figure instantly vanished.

A flash of the sword sliced through the air. Within an instant, Kamito had cut down the two assassins.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes—"

With one knee against the ground, Rubia stood up.

She glanced at the exposed faces of the assassinations. They seemed to be young girls roughly the same age as Kamito.

"...Combatants from the Instructional School!?"

Kamito could not help but exclaim.

"They used to be part of my private army. Sjora Kahn must be the one who sent these assassins."

Rubia spoke with pain in her voice.

Rubia had adopted the orphans after the Instructional School's demise, raising them as her private army. However, during the Blade Dance, Sjora Kahn had stolen them away.

Sjora had sent these girls as assassins.

"Kamito, it's coming—"

Holding a flaming whip, Claire called out.

The Chimera swung its thick tail, sweeping across the ground.

Kamito picked up Rubia in his arms and jumped into the air.

After landing, he gently put down Rubia.

"Defeat that militarized spirit, Ren Ashbell."

"Yeah, I don't need you to tell me—"

He was about to take off his cloak when...

"Do it as you are."

"Huh?"

Hearing that, Kamito asked in response.

"Show these people your power as the Demon King."

"Are you kidding me...?"

...This Demon King's armor, only focused on looks, was far worse in mobility than the Academy's uniform, specially designed for the Blade Dance. Furthermore, the skull mask was heavy and blocked more than half of his vision. However—

If he were to remove this Demon King's mask now, he would definitely expose himself in front of the crowd.

"A merely militarized spirit of a bygone era is no match for you now, right?"

"Easy for you to say—"

Kamito groaned and looked up at the magic beast spirit that was glaring all around it.

He ought to aim for the head to destroy the spirit, but the goat head and the snake tail were quite troublesome.

"Claire, immobilize it! Rinslet, cover me! Ellis, protect everyone!"

"Got it!" "Understood!" "Yes, leave it to me!"

Kamito poured divine power into his two swords.

"Est, Restia—Let's go for a big one!"

(Yes, Kamito—)

(Understood.)

Responding to his call, the silver-white sacred sword glowed with blinding brilliance whereas the jet-black demon sword erupted with lightning.

The Chimera's roar shook the air. Kicking with its hind legs, it leaped.

In that instant, the divine power Kamito had concentrated in his feet exploded all at once.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Seventh Form—Biting Dragon!"

This was an anti-air Absolute Blade Art making use of Purple Lightning. The light of divine power exploded. Within an eye's blink, two figures crossed each other. The magic beast spirit's thick legs were severed as a result.

Guoooooooooooooooooooo!

Losing balance in the air, the magic beast spirit crashed heavily against the wall of the drill ground.

Landing on the ground, Kamito instantly rushed at the Chimera whose movements had stopped —

However, the goat head on its back turned around and roared.

Several blazing fireballs immediately appeared out of thin air, crashing down at Kamito.

—It was Fireball spirit magic.

(...Independent control systems!?)

Kamito widened his eyes but —

"Incinerate it, scorching conflagration — Fireball!"

At the same time, Claire released fireballs to collide with them violently.

The flames exploded in the air above, lighting up the dark night sky.

Crushing the wall with its jaws, the lion stood up on one leg and roared in anger. The snake for a tail struggled violently in pain. The goat head on the back began to chant spirit magic again.

But in that instant...

"— Vicious wind, rampage!"

"— Freezing fangs of ice, go forth and pierce, Freezing Arrow!"

Ellis' wind blades amputated the tail —

Rinslet's arrow pierced the goat's head.

"Do it now, Kamito!"

"Yeah— "

Holding the sacred sword and the demon sword, both infused with divine power, Kamito sprinted.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Destructive Form—Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance - Twelve Consecutive Strikes!"

He unleashed countless slashes upon the magic beast spirit—

The tactical-class militarized spirit turned into particles of light and vanished.

Lowering his two swords, Kamito turned around to look at the crowd.

They looked like they were still in disarray.

Sounds of prayers and crying could be heard everywhere.

Although wind from the blast and flying stone fragments had been blocked by Fianna's barrier, some people had been injured from the explosion when the militarized spirit first appeared.

(...So, what should I do?)

Kamito looked at Rubia for directions.

Rubia shook her head slightly... *Do as you please*, apparently.

(...I have to improvise huh?)

Kamito groaned under the skull mask and shook his head.

(No helping it...)

Stabbing both swords into the ground, Kamito extended his arms lightly towards the crowd.

"—Silence, my people."

His solemn voice instantly made the crowd quiet.

"—You witnessed my power, right? Vanquishing me is impossible. What happened a thousand years ago will not repeat again. The fools of Zohar who dare oppose me shall be punished!"

At the Demon King's powerful declaration —

"YEAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

Massive cheering, enough to shake the ground, erupted.

"Wow, it's true, he is the true Demon King!" "S-Such a terrifying spirit and yet he destroyed it so easily!" "The Demon King will make the Theocracy's witch learn her lesson!"

Demon King! Demon King! Demon King! Demon King! Demon King!
Demon King!

Once again, fear and terror, as well as fervor, took hold of this space —

The cheering went on nonstop.

Chapter 8 - The Crimson Princess Maiden

Part 1

Amid the fervor in the plaza swept with destruction —

The Demon King and his four concubines vanished amid rising black smoke.

"...I never thought they'd use a militarized spirit in this kind of place —"

Using the same elevator he had used to make his appearance, now returning underground, Kamito remarked.

"Yes, but I suppose the silver lining is that there were no deaths in the crowd."

Hearing him, Ellis nodded.

"Is Kamito-kun the target?"

"No, news of our arrival here shouldn't have reached them yet. They were most likely targeting Rubia —"

A mysterious princess maiden who had taken control of the rebel army within mere days would unavoidably incur Sjora's wariness. Sjora must have calculated that the rebel army would fall apart once she was eliminated.

"By the way, you really got into the performance just now..."

"Yes, it did not seem like acting at all. Or perhaps, that is your true nature, Kamito-kun?"

"N-No, it was all an act!"

Kamito retorted.

The "floating stone" carrying Kamito and company stopped underground.

What came into view —

Rubia Elstein, wearing a crimson mask, was waiting for them.

"For starters, allow me to offer praise of well done. Tonight, the rebel army has finally come together as a cohesive whole from the refugee collective it used to be —"

"Don't tell me you arranged for the attack just now?"

Kamito questioned in a harsh tone of voice. Setting up an attack then quelling it to win the crowd's trust was a method frequently employed by rulers but would be crossing the line if Rubia actually did that. Any misstep and there could have been deaths —

"I concede it has not escaped my notice that Zohar personnel infiltrated the Demon's Fist."

"...What!?"

Hearing Rubia's answer, Claire and the others showed anger on their faces.

"—That being said, I did not expect the assassins to bring a tactical-class militarized spirit. This insufficient gathering of intelligence was a failing on my part."

Trying to use that kind of militarized spirit with merely two people was definitely reckless to the extreme. Only someone like Muir Alenstarl with her unusual ability would be capable of completing such a crazy mission successfully.

"You allowed them freedom of movement on purpose?"

"Indeed. Instead of capturing enemy spies, it would be better to make good use of them."

(How bold...)

Even though it was a failure on her part, everything including the attack just now had been used to increase the Demon King's prestige.

She had essentially taken practical control of the rebel army gathered at Mordis here.

"The true war has yet to come. You should all rest properly."

Saying that, dressed in ritual attire, Rubia turned around and vanished into the shadows in the passage.

Once she had receded out of sight, Rinslet sighed.

"...Unavoidably exhausting."

"Anyway, let us purify ourselves."

"Yes, th-this embarrassing outfit, I need to take it off as quickly as possible."

Hearing Fianna's suggestion, everyone nodded.

"Fufu, my lord Demon King, would you like to join us?"

"W-What are you talking about!?"

Kamito hastily shook his head in response to Fianna's mischievous smile.

Part 2

Claire and the girls arrived at an open-air purification facility inside the Demon's Fist and soaked themselves in the hot spring there.

Since the Demon's Fist was built on an active volcano, the hot spring was not natural, but by heating the spring water using highly pure fire spirit crystals, it was still effective in helping their bodies recover from fatigue.

"Mm~, this feels so good... The water quality could give the Elstein springs a run for their money."

Claire stretched her arms out like a cat, partially closing her eyes in pleasure.

"According to local legends in Mordis, this is supposed to be the place where the Demon King's concubines recovered their energies."

"Eh..."

"Your Highness, is this really true?"

"Who knows? It's just a legend after all. No one can confirm its truth.

However, doesn't it feel great to be able to enter the same hot spring that the Demon King's concubines used?"

Leaning against a rock, Fianna chuckled.

"...N-Not in the slightest! W-What concubines!"

"H-Hmm, multiple concubines, what an awful custom—"

"I-Infidelity!"

The other three girls protested with blushing faces.

"But that's only according to Ordesian culture, right? Within the Theocracy, it is very common for the king to marry multiple brides. In my view, it isn't particularly depraved or anything."

"W-Well..."

Unable to muster a rebuttal, Claire began to blow bubbles on the surface of the water.

Having entered the Divine Ritual Institute since childhood, Fianna frequently had the chance to meet princess maidens from other countries. As a result, she did not find it difficult to accept culture and customs foreign to Ordesia's. In contrast, Claire, Rinslet and Ellis had all grown up in prestigious households of Ordesian nobles, hence they had trouble understanding Theocracy customs that went against their concept of traditional marriage, viewing it as immoral.

"By the way, should Legitimate Ordesia allow polygamy like the Theocracy, I wonder?"

"W-What, w-what are you talking about!? Th-That's unacceptable, absolutely unacceptable!"

"Oh dear, but I am the monarch of Legitimate Ordesia, you know? I have the right to decide laws."

"Th-That's tyranny!"

"We demand setting up a council!"

"Good grief, this is why the nobles of Ordesia are such stubborn fools..."

Fianna shrugged in exasperation.

"However, contrary to expectations, perhaps Kamito-kun might agree."

"Eh?"

The three girls looked at one another.

"W-What do you mean by that..."

"How much of Kamito-kun's Demon King mode earlier do you think was acting?"

"...!"

Claire and the girls looked at one another.

Indeed, Kamito was acting differently from usual when he put on the Demon King's mask earlier.

Even though Kamito insisted he was merely acting, was that really all there was to it? Perhaps he had a disposition in that direction to begin with and dressing up as the Demon King merely revealed it—

If this were true, Kamito could very likely agree with Fianna's proposal and make his move on every woman around him, setting his eyes on every female encountered, showing no fidelity at all—

(N-No, n-no way—)

At that moment...

"Fufu, this looks pretty fun. May I join in—?"

"...! Y-You—!?"

Hearing *her* voice from who knew where, Claire widened her eyes.

Out from the shadows of the rocks emerged the darkness spirit with jet-black wings.

She was not wearing her usual dress in the color of darkness. Completely naked, she dipped herself into the water.

Clear eyes the color of dusk. Illuminated mysteriously under the moonlight, her figure was so beautiful that Claire could not help staring mesmerized despite being a member of the same sex.

"Darkness spirit, w-what are you doing here!?"

Claire stood up warily.

Things were fine when she had lost her memories, but now, she was not someone to be trusted.

Although she looked like she was not going to turn against Kamito, one could not say the same for Claire and the others.

"Nothing. I am not here to do anything, Miss Hellcat—"

Restia chuckled.

"I am simply here to enjoy the hot spring. I originally wanted to share a soak together with Kamito, but he lectured me, saying no. So that leaves me no choice but to come to this side."

"What—I-Is, isn't that obviously unacceptable!"

"Th-That is correct. E-Even for a contracted spirit, a m-m-mixed bath is—"

Claire and Ellis cried out with reddened faces.

"—By the way, aren't you a spirit? There's no need to clean yourself, right!?"

"Oh my, but spirits enjoy hot springs too, you know? After all, it is suitable for replenishing divine power."

Splash. Restia stretched out her legs in the water.

Her beautiful and lustrous black hair, seeming like it would meld into the night, spread out on the water surface.

"—Also, I would like to thank all of you."

"Thank?"

Hearing that, Claire frowned, full of suspicion.

"Yes, during my amnesia, didn't you all help to look after the other me? Although my current self never experienced it, the memories have been preserved in whole."

Restia swept her gaze across the faces of Claire and the girls.

"Although we have had many differences in the past, let us reconcile."

She gently extended her hand towards Claire.

"...R-Reconcile?"

Claire showed surprise on her face.

The trio of Ellis, Fianna and Rinslet looked at one another with equally troubled expressions.

Claire glared at Restia before her and said:

"Y-You still remember everything you did to us, right?"

She had given Claire a berserk spirit when she was sad over the loss of Scarlet, she had directed Jio Inzagi to attack the Academy, she had also partnered with the dark monster Nepenthes Lore during the Blade Dance's preliminary round to assault Team Scarlet's base—

Their complicated past with the darkness spirit could not be reset to a clean slate so easily.

"You have a point. I have done things to you that merit bearing a grudge. I apologize."

Seeing her bow her head sincerely, Claire fell silent.

She actually knew in her heart. Everything this darkness spirit had been done was with consideration for Kamito.

Her sacrifice for Kamito was genuine. Precisely because she knew this, Claire had such complicated feelings in her heart. However —

Claire looked at the trio behind her.

Then with calm expressions, they all nodded gently.

(...That's right. I should act a bit more mature.)

Claire quietly sighed then stared into Restia's eyes intently.

"...I guess there are things I need to thank you for too."

"...Eh?"

"I heard it from Kamito before. You were the one who helped Kamito recover his heart and feelings when he was approaching breaking point. If you hadn't nurtured Kamito, we never would have met the current Kamito —"

Claire sighed and shook Restia's hand.

"...Fine, let the past be water under the bridge."

Restia's eyes widened slightly in surprise. Then...

"—Thank you."

She spoke words of gratitude.

"Then may I join you?"

"Sure you may, but put away those wings. They're against the rules."

"Fufu, I see..."

When Claire pointed that out, the jet-black wings turned into particles of light and disappeared.

Soaking herself up to her shoulders in the hot spring, Restia recited an incantation. Immediately, several small cups appeared out of thin air.

"This is rose wine, a specialty of Mordis. Let this be my gift of reconciliation."

"...Let us drink."

Under the moonlight, Claire and company quietly toasted.

Part 3

—At the same time, Kamito was enjoying a leisurely dip in the hot spring at the open-air purification facility.

"Hoo, I feel alive again..."

Kamito placed a wet towel on his forehead and leaned against a mossy rock.

Against a large militarized spirit, even Kamito could not avoid consuming a large quantity of divine power. Even Est, placed against a nearby rock, would have to remain in sword form for the time being.

"But I never expected I'd ever have to be the Demon King..."

Looking up at the foreign sky with twinkling stars, Kamito muttered in a daze.

Originally, his plan was to play the Demon King according to Rubia's script, but before he knew it, some sort of limiter in his subconscious seemed to

have lifted, causing him to make a declaration he would never say in normal times—

(Don't tell me this mask is also imbued with that kind of magic...)

With eyes of suspicion, Kamito glanced at the Demon King's mask floating on the water surface.

—At that moment.

Splash.

With a faint sound of water, small ripples began to spread on the water surface.

"—It appears that you have yet to fully control the Darkness Elemental Lord's power, Ren Ashbell."

"...!?"

Hearing the voice, Kamito could not help but stand up.

Only to see appearing behind the steam—

A princess maiden with crimson hair, dressed in white ritual attire.

"...R-Rubia!?"

Seeing her figure, Kamito instantly gasped. Why did she show up here? Before he could ask, his consciousness was seized by her beauty first.

"W-What are you doing—"

Ignoring the flustered Kamito, Rubia slowly lowered herself into the hot spring.

Her gorgeous long ruby-like hair began spreading out on the water surface like fallen petals.

Then with ruby eyes just like Claire's, she stared intently at Kamito —

"You must have consumed plenty of divine power in the battle earlier. I am here to confirm whether you have been corrupted by Ren Ashdoll's power —"

With slender fingers, she gently touched Kamito's face.

"...!"

Perhaps it was because her skin became visible under her ritual attire after it became wet. Faced with unexpected stimulation, Kamito felt his heart pounding.

Although her younger sister Claire was an amazing beauty so long as she stayed quiet, Rubia's appearance was like a more mature version of Claire, with an additional mysterious melancholic allure that the younger Elstein lacked.

"Y-Yeah, I'm fine..."

While shifting his gaze away from her gorgeous body, Kamito replied.

Despite having used the bold move of the Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance, Kamito was still far from going all-out earlier. It should be different from when he was rescuing Fianna at the imperial capital.

"Is that so —"

However, Rubia narrowed her eyes of ruby —

"...*The corruption has already reached such an extent, huh?*"

"...? What do you mean —"

Kamito was interrupted mid-sentence.

Because she suddenly pressed her lips upon his.

"...!?"

The paralyzing sense of pleasure flowed through his brain for an instant.

Faced with her unexpected action, Kamito was unable to react in any way.

While caressing Kamito's cheek gently, Rubia slowly moved her lips away.

"...! ...Y-You, what... the hell..."

Kamito muttered in a daze.

—No sooner had he spoken...

"...H-Huh?"

He noticed that his body suddenly felt lighter.

Expanding divine power was coursing through his entire body, instantly erasing the fatigue inside him.

"..What did you do?"

"I knew it. Even you are not aware of it."

Rubia looked strictly at Kamito.

"Left alone, you are going to be devoured by the power of darkness at this rate."

She declared.

"...!? The power of darkness? I didn't feel it at all just now."

Kamito objected.

In the previous battle, Kamito had neither felt his divine power depleting nor encountered the feeling of Ren Ashdoll's power corrupting his body, one that he had felt multiple times before. As far as he could tell, he had not heard *her* voice, trying to entice him to awaken as the Demon King either.

"It is because your divine power is gradually merging with Ren Ashdoll's power. You are already corrupted by the power of darkness —"

"...What!?"

Speechless, Kamito stared at his hands.

(...Don't tell me, it was during that time, huh?)

Speaking of which, during the battle against Greyworth, the moment just as he was about to be devoured by the power of darkness —

There had been a feeling like some kind of shackles being lifted.

Suppose what Rubia just said was true, then the power of darkness might devour him in the future before his divine power reached depletion.

"This is my oversight. I failed to realize the possibility that you might have been corrupted this much, and even asked you to fight that militarized spirit —"

Withdrawing her hand from Kamito's cheek, Rubia slowly stood up.

Water droplets were slowly falling from the tips of her wet crimson hair.

"W-What —"

"From now on, whenever you are about to be devoured by the power of darkness — Use me, Ren Ashbell."

"...? What does that mean —"

Hearing her declaration, Kamito responded in puzzlement.

Then—

"In other words, use my body as you please—"

Rubia spoke in a calm tone of voice.

"I can serve you as Queen, to become a sacrifice for swallowing the power of darkness—"

Saying that, she lightly slid off her wet ritual attire.

"...!?"

In that instant, Kamito widened his eyes.

Under the moonlight, her gorgeous body, covered with glistening water droplets, was in full display.

Two bulges, tracing out beautiful curves. Long slender legs evocative of a doe's. Crimson hair, draping over her pale skin. She looked like a goddess.

However—

"—*An ugly body, wouldn't you agree?*"

She spoke with self-derision.

Her beautiful naked body—

Was marked by numerous patterns resembling countless intertwined snakes.

"Cursed armament seals were implanted all over my body in order to summon the Sacred Maiden's power and the ultimate flame spirit Laevateinn. This body is now the farthest thing away from a pure princess maiden. It is merely a poisonous vessel covered with filthy curses. I care not

how you violate it. Just do with it as you please, whenever you desire it. I can be the venting target for suppressing your power of darkness. It is the only contribution I am capable of now that I have lost my powers as an elemental—"



"...!"

Kamito was at a loss for words, facing Rubia who had delivered such words seriously.

Clenching his trembling fist, he stared into her eyes squarely.

Staring at those ruby eyes with crimson flames within them —

"You are always acting like that —"

"...What?"

"Foisting everything on yourself, trying to handle everything alone. That's why four years ago, you vanished without telling your true thoughts and feelings to Fianna or your one and only little sister —"

"I am simply atoning for my sin."

Hearing what he said, Rubia shook her head.

"It's not your fault that the land of Elstein was ravaged by fire."

"It is my sin. Because I was the Queen serving the Fire Elemental Lord —"

Stubbornly set in her ways, she remained unconvinced.

For the sake of atoning for that sin, she had carved innumerable cursed armament seals onto her body.

...What massive resolve she must have committed.

She had been fighting bravely alone.

Suppressing all her emotions under that crimson mask —

And now, she still intends to sacrifice herself alone.

"..."

Kamito and Rubia stared at each other for a few seconds.

The first to look away was Rubia.

She slowly turned her body and told Kamito in her usual voice, cold as ever.

"In a few days, the rebel forces will be rallied to attack Zohar. Recuperate and rest as much as possible for now, Demon King—"

While Rubia was preparing to leave, Kamito spoke to her from behind:

"...I went to your study in the flying ship."

Kamito said to her.

Rubia halted.

"By chance, I found them. The letters Claire wrote to you."

Yes, kept between the books in the study were Claire's letters. Written in childish handwriting, they had been sent to the elder sister who had separated from her to enter the Divine Ritual Institute.

Rubia must have read them too many times to count. Left on the letters were signs of repeated reading.

"Claire always wanted to talk to you—"

"I am not her elder sister. I have already lost that right—"

"...Are you happy with things being like that!?"

"Yes. The person named Rubia Elstein was rendered ash the day of that fire. Standing before you right now is merely a corpse left behind by the crimson blaze."

Saying that, she disappeared into the darkness of the night.

Part 4

"—Alright, stop moving. Settle down."

"...Shut up. Don't touch me."

Saladia was just about to chant healing magic when Jio Inzagi violently brushed her hand away.

"This will naturally heal on its own. After all, I am the Demon King's successor."

Showing off the cursed armament seal carved on his arm, Jio grinned fearlessly.

"...As you wish. When pus forms in the wound, I shan't be held responsible."

Saladia sighed in exasperation and closed the book-type elemental waffe.

"This place will soon be discovered, right? We must not linger for long."

They were currently hiding in a heretical Demon King cult chapel that Sjora Kahn had destroyed, turning it into a set of ruins.

There were still many knights of the royal guard in the surrounding areas, currently searching for her whereabouts.

Although Saladia had deployed an isolation barrier around the structure to prevent people from approaching, any well-trained elementalist would notice a barrier of this level.

Outside the chapel, a sandstorm was howling.

Sandstorms would blow in Zohar a couple nights every month. Although they could not hide here forever, it was true that they had no way of leaving until the sandstorm ended.

"Tsk, annoying sand."

"This is the Demon King's breath."

"Huh?"

"A legend. These sandstorms are the breaths of Demon King Solomon—"

"Stupid superstitions."

"Perhaps..."

While concurring, Saladia murmured in her thoughts.

(...On the other hand, I find talk about the Demon King's reincarnation even more superstitious.)

Naturally, she would never voice such opinions—

Putting aside whether this man was the Demon King's reincarnation, as a bodyguard, he was undoubtedly quite excellent.

Indeed, amazing was the only word to describe Jio Inzagi's combat style just now.

Successively releasing the spirits that Saladia had sealed into his cursed armament seals, he discarded them immediately after using them. This horrifying combat style was unthinkable to any normal elementalists.

Under the weak illumination of a glowing orb, Saladia gazed at the young man's profile. Finally, she mustered her courage and asked:

"...Who on earth are you?"

"I am the Demon King's successor."

"No, not in that sense... Any ordinary person would have died from having so many cursed armament seals implanted. Where on earth did these things—"

Jio Inzagi bared his teeth and grinned fearlessly.

"From a certain facility that raised and trained me —"

"Facility?"

"A facility that a princess like you won't know about. I was taken there as a baby where they all kinds of things with my body as they pleased... Oh well, in short, it was hell on earth. Those without aptitude died one after another. Once old enough to speak, kids were forced to kill one another, then tossed into the bottom of a valley like trash—"

"No way..."

Saladia covered her mouth with her hands, unable to speak.

...This man was probably speaking the truth. Based on a princess maiden's instinct, she could see through lies.

However, having grown up in the royal palace, she was unable to imagine that kind of hell.

"Hey, what's with that look in your eyes? Are you pitying me?"

Jio Inzagi narrowed his eyes sharply and glared at Saladia.

"Don't use your own fucking standards to measure others. I'm very grateful that my body turned out like this. Thanks to that, I am one step closer to the Demon King—"

Looking at the cursed armament seal carved on his arm, he made terrifying smile.

"Why are you so... about the Demon King—"

Just as Saladia was about to ask him...

The chapel's floor shook while dust and debris on the ceiling came clattering down.

"...What, an earthquake?"

"...No, Zohar has never had any earthquakes before—"

Saying that, she stopped, her body trembling in terror.

"—Could it be that my sister has released *that seal*?"

Part 5

Across the desert with a sandstorm howling through the night, two ground dragons were dashing.

They were carrying Muir and Lily, heading to Zohar for reconnaissance.

"An hour or so until we reach Zohar. Don't get careless, Muir."

"Nothing to worry about. If we're discovered, just take out the enemy and it'll be fine, right?"

"Our mission is simply to return with gathered intelligence. We must avoid fighting as much as possible—"

Lily scolded her sharply. In that instant...

Suddenly, there was a terrifying rumbling in the ground. The desert shook violently.

"...W-What?" "What is going on!?"

The eerie rumbling in the earth persisted. The ground dragons crouched down in fear.

This was no simple earthquake.

The rhythmic vibrations were almost like a living creature's fetal movements—

"Lily, something is approaching..."

"...Wh...at?"

Lily stared intently through the howling sandstorm.

Then her eyes widened in shock.

"...Isn't that Zohar!?"

Chapter 9 - Leviathan

Part 1

Before dawn. After relaxing in the hot spring then returning to his room to sleep comfortably, Kamito opened his eyes to a start, feeling movement in his bed.

"...W-What's going on!?"

He suddenly sat up and frantically lifted his sheets —

"Oh my, you've woken up. What a shame."

Dressed in a Theocracy-style dress, Restia chuckled with a mischievous smile, leaning herself against Kamito in bed.

"W-W-What are you doing!?"

Kamito could not help but cry out.

"Because I had to stay in sword form the whole time, I could not play the part of the Demon King's concubine, could I? It is a bit unfair that only those girls could be princesses — "

Restia slowly got up, brushing the beautiful black hair draping over her neck.

Decorated with exquisite lace, the sheer garment offered a transparent view to her flawless pale skin. Her appearance, bewitching and alluring, made Kamito stare mesmerized, forgetting the current situation for a moment.

"How is it, Kamito? Does it look good on me?"

"Y-Yeah, it's incredibly... pretty..."

With his mind still hazy and half asleep, he gave his honest opinion.

"Fufu, thank you..."

Restia's lips parted with a smile as she laid her head gently against Kamito's shoulder.

The fine strands of her hair touched his cheek, making his heart pound nonstop.

"H-Hey, Restia!?"

Blushing intensely, Kamito cried out. At that moment...

"Kamito, look at me too."

"...!?"

Hearing a voice from the opposite side, he turned his head over with a jerk.

"I am wearing a princess dress too—"

"E-Est!?"

In that instant, Kamito reeled back greatly.

What entered his view was—

Est almost completely nude, wearing only knee socks to cover her feet.

"W-What, w-what...!"

"...? Kamito, what is wrong?"

Still expressionless, Est inclined her head with puzzlement.

Kamito hastily turned his gaze away.

"W-What princess dress... Aren't you wearing *nothing at all*!?"

He pointed out the apparent truth.

...Well, it was not the first time for Est to enter his bed wearing nothing but kneesocks, but even so, it still was not something he got used to.

Furthermore, Est had also said she was wearing a princess dress just now.

However, she was still in the usual naked kneesocks look, what the heck was going on...?

Still—

"...? Kamito, what are you talking about?"

Her clear and violet eyes were gazing squarely at Kamito.

...She did not seem to be joking.

Besides, Est did not tell jokes to begin with. Of course, neither did she lie.

"Fufu, that dress looks absolutely lovely on you, Miss Sword Spirit."

At that moment, Restia commented.

"...Huh?"

Kamito once again examined Est before him closely.

...In the end, it was still her usual naked kneesocks look. There was no dress at all.

"W-What's going on?"

Seeing Kamito tilt his head, Est spun around on the spot.

"Kamito, this is a dress woven from divine power, only visible to you."

She proudly puffed out her petite chest.

"..."

"Because I cannot see it, the darkness spirit helped me put it on."

Kamito slowly turned his head towards Restia.

Only to see Restia covering her mouth, giggling malevolently.

(...I get it now.)

Kamito sighed and faced Est again.

"Uh, Est, it's hard for me to say this, but you were probably tricked."

"...?"

"—I don't see anything."

"...?"

"Est, you're not wearing anything."

"....."

After a few seconds of silence—

Without any emotion at all, Est's violet eyes stared at Restia next to Kamito.

"Darkness spirit, you tricked me?"

"Fufu, how could such a weird dress even exist?"

Restia shrugged "oh dear" in response.

In that instant, Est's hair glowed with intense light and the sheets on the bed floated up lightly.

Rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble...!

"Darkness spirit, you need to be destroyed after all—"

"Oh my, how scary. It was just a joke."

Restia smiled fearlessly then hugged Kamito's arm tightly.

"R-Restia!?"

"Hands off, darkness spirit. Kamito is my contractor —"

In opposition to Restia, Est hugged his other arm.

"Est!?"

Kamito's voice turned shrill.

After all, Est was virtually nude at the moment. Something soft was pressed against his arm. Meanwhile, Restia's competitiveness was stimulated too and Kamito could feel two bulges pressing against him with only her dress in between.



Sandwiched between two contracted spirits, Kamito's entire body froze, unable to move.

...This was not the spirit sandwich from last time.

This extremely dangerous sensation —

(...Could this be the *spirit mille-feuille*?)

Just as that term surfaced in his mind...

"Kamito, b-bad news—What!?"

Suddenly the door was opened.

Entering through the door was Claire in her pajamas.

"W-What, w-what are y-you doing!?"

Seeing Kamito hugged by two spirits, Claire's twintails stood up like burning pillars of flame.

"N-No! Th-This is, basically, the two of them are making spirit mille-feuille—"

...Kamito gave an incoherent and incomprehensible explanation.

"T-Turn, t-turn into charcoal—"

"Wait, Claire, now is not the time!"

This time, it was Rinslet's turn to arrive. Like handling a cat, she caught Claire by the back collar.

"...Y-You are right."

Claire coughed lightly and immediately put on a grave expression.

"Kamito, come right away. *We have an emergency—*"

Part 2

"—Zohar is approaching!?"

Hearing the report, Kamito could not help but ask.

The group had gathered in the underground conference room of the Demon's Fist. At the table were Ellis and Fianna in their Academy uniforms and Rubia.

"—Indeed. Heading straight for here, Mordis."

"Uh, I don't understand..."

Kamito made a puzzled expression. Claire and Rinslet, who had gone to fetch Kamito, probably missed the detailed explanation too, and showed baffled expressions too.

"To think that a city is moving, how could that be possible?"

"Did the two who went to scout possibly be mistaken...?"

"As much as I would prefer that to be true —"

Rubia calmly shook her head then extended her hand towards the projection mirror on the table.

"This was the image Lily sent through Telepathy an hour ago —"

Once infused with divine power, the projection mirror glowed with white light. This was a magic artifact capable of showing images from afar, also used by spectators during the Blade Dance.

"...Th-This is!?"

Seeing the image shown on the mirror, everyone stared in amazement.

Displayed was a completely unbelievable and surreal scene.

A giant city, surrounded by walls, producing a massive cloud of dust in its wake, was *moving along the ground*.

Countless tentacles had extended from gaps in the walls, advancing slowly as though devouring sand.

Crawling on the ground, it was reminiscent of a slime mold, filling the observer with reflexive revulsion.

"...W-What is this...!?"

Claire moaned in a stiff voice.

"...Could it be that they released Leviathan's seal?"

Sitting next to Kamito, Restia spoke softly with a solemn expression.

"Leviathan?"

"A *strategic-class* militarized spirit deployed during the Ranbal War. In the same class as Jormungandr sleeping in Ordesia's mountain mine, a weapon of mass destruction even surpassing that —"

"...Spirit? Zohar is a spirit?"

"Leviathan is a possession-type militarized spirit. Its job is merge with a city, converting it into a gigantic mobile fortress. According to war records, Leviathan destroyed a city in merely seventeen hours of operation."

Rubia explained patiently.

"A spirit that merges with a city..."

"...H-How can this be... S-Something like that can still be called a spirit!?"

Ellis smashed her trembling fist on the table. Deprived of its dignity as a spirit, converted into such a terrifying weapon, it was only natural to feel angry to see such an appearance.

"However, the seven strategic-class militarized spirits ought to have been sealed away and scrapped under the provisions of the international treaty. To violate the ban, is Sjora Kahn intending to make enemies out of all surrounding nations?"

"...Indeed, I have not predicted this."

Faced with Fianna's question, Rubia nodded.

"My only conclusion is that she has resigned herself to self-abandonment. However, the fact that the rebel forces have gathered at the Demon's Fist presents a perfect opportunity from her perspective."

"She intends to crush them in one go..."

The image on the projection mirror went blurry like sandstorm and was soon cut off.

"This is all that was sent by Telepathy. According to that thing's movement speed, I fear it will arrive here in a few hours."

Hearing what Rubia said, everyone fell silent.

From Kamito's perspective, he was quite worried about Muir and Lily's safety, though he could hardly imagine the two of them making mistakes. Hopefully, they were not going to get caught up in that—

"How should that strategic-class militarized spirit be stopped?"

Claire asked at this point.

"Once activated, Leviathan will not stop until its divine power supply is cut off. Furthermore, it is most likely stealing divine power from the residents of Zohar—"

"What did you say!?"

Claire groaned from the back of her throat.

Militarized spirits were usually controlled by teams of trained elementalists. However, Rubia's explanation implied that Leviathan was able to acquire divine power autonomously, hence it could virtually continue operating indefinitely.

(It won't stop until all the residents of Zohar have lost their lives—)

"How about finding a place to evacuate to?"

Rinslet suggested.

"For us, that would work. But escaping with all the refugees gathered here would be impossible, probably."

"Oh no..."

Indeed, Rubia was correct. Evacuating this many refugees within a few short hours would be impossible in theory. Furthermore, even if they escaped successfully, these refugees had nowhere to go. Only two fates awaited them, dying out on the scorching desert or crushed by Leviathan when it annihilated Mordis—

(...How can we just let them die?)

Under the table, Kamito silently clenched his fist.

These refugees placed absolute faith in Kamito—the resurrected Demon King.

There was no way he could bring himself to betray that trust.

"...Is there any way to stop it?"

"There is only one way to stop this strategic-class militarized spirit, that is to infiltrate Zohar to destroy the central core that catalyzed Leviathan and Zohar's union —"

"Where is that?"

When Kamito asked, Rubia spread a map on the table.

"What is this?"

"A floor plan of Scorpia, the residence of the Theocracy's royal family. I secretly obtained it during my stay in the Demon King cult."

"As expected of you, meticulous as ever —"

"Suppose one were to operate Leviathan, then the military facility called the Demon's Circuit, located underground beneath Scorpia, would undoubtedly be used as the core —"

"...The Demon's Circuit?"

"It is a so-called divine power amplification reactor that Demon King Solomon built a thousand years ago. Indeed, by using that, even a princess maiden of Sjora Kahn's level would be able to release Leviathan —"

Restia spoke quietly with a mysterious look on her face.

"...Got it. In any case, all we need to do is destroy it."

Claire became fired up and declared.

"However, infiltrating the enemy's home base would certainly be reckless."

"T-True..."

"I agree on the plan being reckless, but there is no other way to stop Leviathan—"

"..."

Hearing Rubia, Claire and the others were at a loss for words.

"Then I will stop it. After all, I promised as the Demon King."

At that moment, Kamito stood up.

"I won't let you go alone. I'm coming too."

"Me too."

"I-I will go too."

"And me, of course. As the Demon King's concubine, after all—"

Claire, Ellis, Rinslet and Fianna stood up one after another and looked at Kamito.

"No, I can do this myself—"

Kamito stopped mid-sentence.

Their eyes pleaded with strong determination.

—You are not going to leave us behind, right?

(Uh...)

These intense gazes made Kamito falter.

However, he knew without needing Rubia to point out that this was a reckless plan. Of course, these girls were reliable companions, but at the same time, they were also precious girls whom he must protect.

Taking them into life-threatening danger—

At that moment...

"Take them. They will surely aid you."

"Restia?"

Unbelievably, the one to break the silence was Restia sitting beside him.

Surprised, Kamito kept staring at her intently, only to see her smile calmly and nod silently.

Claire and the girls were probably surprised by her support too. They seem a bit troubled, looking at one another.

However, their gazes soon returned to Kamito —

"Y-Yes, we trained ourselves for the sake of fighting by your side."

"Yes, we will not be a burden." "I will shoot down each and every one of those terrifying tentacles without fail." "Leave support to me."

Hearing Claire's declaration, the other three girls nodded with confident expressions.

With four companions and his contracted spirit looking at him —

Kamito made his decision.

(...I can't believe I was thinking of fighting alone. Maybe I am a bit too full of myself.)

After all, Kamito had received their aid in desperate situations many times already.

"Got it. Come fight by my side."

"Yes—"

Kamito agreed and the girls nodded vigorously.

"—We five will be the ones to infiltrate Zohar, is that okay?"

Kamito turned to Rubia and asked.

"Fine by me, except that Fianna must stay here—"

"Eh?"

"Rubia-sama, why!?"

Fianna protested.

"To protect Mordis. To defend against Leviathan's attack, it is necessary to construct a large scale protective barrier around the city."

"Yes, I see..."

Considering the rate Leviathan advanced, destroying the core before it reached Mordis would be too tough a challenge. It was probably necessary to shore up defenses in order to buy as much time as possible.

"...Understood. Then I will stay here to protect the city."

Despite showing understanding, Fianna still looked disappointed.

"I'm counting on you, Fianna."

"Counting on you."

"Yes, leave it to me."

Fianna nodded firmly in response to Kamito and Claire.

"—In that case, the meeting is concluded. Any questions?"

Rubia swept her gaze across everyone.

"Are my esteemed sister's adjustments not ready yet?"

At this moment, Ellis raised her hand.

"Velsaria Eva is still undergoing fine-tuning. Once the Elemental Panzer is ready, I will assign her to the city's defense."

"Understood."

Indeed, Velsaria's Juggernaut had incredible firepower but was also limited by a short operation time, making it unsuitable for infiltration missions. Using it as a defensive fortress would be the better choice.

"I have a question too. Can the Revenant sneak into Zohar?"

"No, the Revenant cannot be used."

Rubia shook her head.

"Military flying ships are equipped with spirit mechanisms as power sources. Containing a divine power reactor, spirit mechanisms make for excellent prey for Leviathan. When such a massive ship approaches from the sky, it will surely be the first to be shot down by anti-air defenses."

"It even has anti-air..."

"Of course. Otherwise, how would it be considered a strategic-class weapon?"

"Fair enough..."

"Then how should we sneak inside?"

Claire asked.

"Use the flying dragon militarized spirits provided by Dracunia."

"Oh those..."

Militarized flying dragon spirits were definitely superior in adapting to the changing situation and suitable for an infiltration mission.

"Any other questions?"

When everyone shook their head, Rubia stood up.

"Then you are dismissed. Once you are ready, assemble at the flying dragon landing zone."

Kamito and company got up from their seats and left the conference room.

Just as Claire, the last person, was about to leave, Rubia stopped her.

"Claire Rouge. Stay behind, I have words for you."

"Huh?"

Part 3

Minutes later, Kamito was ready and standing at the flying dragon landing zone at the pinnacle of the Demon's Fist, looking down at the streets of Mordis.

News of Zohar approaching had the city in an uproar. However, with Rubia at the center and under the efforts of various cult leaders, they managed to prevent the people from entering a state of chaotic panic.

Despite the despairing situation, the crowd did not cause a great commotion. This was probably due in part to the resurrected Demon King giving them something to lean on psychologically.

"Almost time to go, Kamito—"

Looking into the distance, Ellis called out.

Kamito looked at the desert, only to see dust rising in the horizon.

"That's pretty quick..."

"Yes, compared to what we saw in the image, the speed seems to have increased."

"So huge..."

Rinslet's voice trembled slightly.

After all, the city itself had turned into a mobile weapon. If something like that attacked, even a sturdy fortress like the Demon's Fist would not hold.

"Thanks for waiting, everyone —"

At this moment, Claire came up the stairs, panting.

"What did you talk about with Rubia?"

Kamito asked.

"...N-Nothing special..."

Claire looked away, seemingly embarrassed.

Although Kamito found her attitude a bit weird and frowned, he brushed it off. After all, he should not pry into matters between sisters.

"Then let's hurry and set off —"

Kamito took out a stone tablet and released Wyverns, a type of flying dragon militarized spirit.

Rinslet and Claire shared the mid-sized one while Kamito rode the small one. Instead of a flying dragon, Ellis chose to ride Simorgh.

"Rinslet, do you have a dual-rider license for flying spirits?"

"Yes, I obtained the prime-class license at a Ostdakia training school last year."

"Forget about two riders, I don't even have a single-rider license."

That being said, Kamito had already learned the skills for riding flying dragon spirits back at the Instructional School.

"In that case, time to sortie—"

Hugging the neck of the gigantified Simorgh, Ellis called out sternly.

The desert night was calmly advancing towards dawn.

Chapter 10 - The Demon King's Capital

Part 1

Strong winds were howling. The flying dragons carrying Kamito and company were flying across the desert. Flying in the lead was Ellis' Simorgh, producing air currents to lead those following her.

"—Hold onto your reins tight, we will soon approach!"

Ellis cried out loudly.

A gigantic shadow appeared on the far end of their sandstorm-obstructed vision.

It was the city wall of the Theocracy's capital of Zohar, approaching gradually with rumbling noise.

"...! What the heck, that's—"

The weird phenomenon, extremely surreal, was making Kamito and company speechless in surprise.

Sprouted from gaps in the city walls of stone were countless serpentine tentacles, writhing and struggling in what looked like abject pain, slowly advancing along the desert. No, given the mass of such a gigantic entity, this speed was plenty fast already—

"...How terrifying... Is that really a spirit...?"

Flying in the lead, Ellis shuddered hard.

"S-So repulsive!"

"I really want to burn it to charcoal..."

Riding the same mount, Rinslet and Claire expressed instinctual disgust.

...One could hardly blame them. After all, this the appearance of this "spirit" was so terrifying.

While slowly eating through the desert, polluting it, the city looked like a massive slime mold.

The scene was total desecration of the existence of spirits. In the eyes of proper elementalists, it was unwatchable.

'Kamito, it is no longer a spirit—'

Est's voice sounded in Kamito's mind.

Her voice was calm without any fluctuation in emotion. However, having spent so much time with this partner, Kamito could hear the feelings in her voice.

—Est was angry. It was directed at all the humans responsible for converting Leviathan, a noble top-tier spirit, into such a state—

'I agree. The great Sea King Leviathan is no longer. Even though we had fought on opposing sides during the Spirit War, I cannot tolerate the sight of such sacrilege.'

Sea King Leviathan was a trusted commander serving the Water Elemental Lord. During the Spirit War, Leviathan had engaged in many fierce battles against Restia and Dragon King Bahamut.

Seeing a mortal rival transformed into a militarized spirit, losing all faculty of reason, how did she feel?

'At least put this abomination to rest. For the sake of a past rival in war—'

"Yeah, I got it—"

As though absorbing Est's tranquil fury and Restia's thoughts and feelings—

Kamito gripped the hilts of his two swords tightly.

"Distance to target: 60, 50, 40, 30, 20—"

Leading as the vanguard, Ellis raised her voice.

To penetrate the Theocracy's anti-air defenses, they were going to charge just like that—

(...!?)

—At that moment, having survived countless life and death situations since childhood, Kamito instinctively felt an ominous presence.

"This is bad! Ellis, evade!"

"What?"

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

Leviathan roared.

"Kyah!" "What on earth!?"

The astounding shockwave of sound struck Kamito and company in the sky over Zohar.

Screeching shrilly as though screaming, the flying dragon spirits began to spin out of control.

(...! We're gonna crash!?)

Part 2

Meanwhile, inside the Demon's Fist in the fortress city of Mordis, preparations for engaging Leviathan were rapidly in progress.

"O holy light that illuminates the world, form a sturdy shield to protect us—"

On top of the city's defensive wall, cult princess maidens were constructing a barrier under Fianna's direction.

This was a large-scale barrier covering Mordis and its surroundings. Following leylines to produce resonance between multiple barriers, this produced defensive power up to dozens of times greater than usual. With major leylines running through the mine's vicinity, this geographic advantage was also the reason why Mordis could become an impregnable fortress.

Shield of Alexandros—This was a strategic barrier used by military forces during the last Ranbal War.

"Phew, this is complete for now."

Having finished the final barrier, Fianna wiped the sweat on her forehead.

She was fast reaching her limit in exhaustion due to erecting multiple barriers within short time.

Since the Theocracy lacked national educational institutes like Areishia Spirit Academy, there were very few princess maidens who had undergone proper training except those in the military, thus adding to Fianna's burden.

Although Rubia, the former Queen, had handled the magic circle and other preparations, having implanted cursed armament seals and lost her contracted spirit, she could no longer use her princess maiden powers freely.

"You have grown more capable. In the past, constructing barriers was not your forte."

Wearing a crimson mask, Rubia stood on the city wall, speaking quietly.

"I am still far from matching you, Rubia-sama, as you were four years ago, or Reicha."

Fianna slowly shook her head.

"However, I do feel I have grown. After meeting Kamito-kun as well as your younger sister —"

"I see."

Rubia stopped talking and fell silent.

Her gaze was focused on Leviathan, approaching while accompanied by a sandstorm. Currently, they were close enough that one could see Leviathan's terrifying form with the unaided eye without relying on Far Vision magic.

(I hear the screams of spirits...)

Fianna closed her eyes with a pained expression, clasping her hands tightly together.

Many spirits in Zohar had been devoured by Leviathan to steal all of their divine power. Spirits deprived of divine power could not even return to Astral Zero, thus erased from the world.

Reciting a requiem prayer, Fianna stood on the defensive wall and gave orders to the Theocracy's princess maidens that were gathered.

"Next, we will activate the strategic barrier. Get ready, all of you —"

As though responding to Fianna's solemn voice —

Lined up neatly on the defensive wall, the princess maidens made a hand sign in unison —

In that instant, the numerous magic circles set up around the fortress city started to glow in a chain reaction.

Dots of light instantly linked together, thus the gigantic barrier covering all of Mordis was complete.

The earthquake caused by Leviathan had already reached here.

The cult princess maidens all looked at their adjacent companions in worry.

As though to inspire courage in them, Fianna stood on the defensive wall and glared squarely at the approaching Leviathan.

Although no one could tell how long this strategic barrier could last —

(...Kamito-kun, we trust that you will surely protect this place.)

Encouraged by her example, the princess maidens stopped showing outward fear and nodded at each other with fortitude.

"—How like a holy maiden."

"No, I am the Demon King's concubine, Rubia-sama —"

Fianna smiled fearlessly.

Part 3

Devouring the desert, Leviathan roared, shaking the air.

Struck directly by the shockwave, Kamito's flying dragon spirit spun out of control while crashing down.

"W-Wait, don't fall down, Rinslet!"

"I know! But the flying dragon will not listen to my orders!"

The flying dragon carrying Claire and Rinslet also cried out and spun into an uncontrolled trajectory. Despite Rinslet's attempts to regain control, desperately pouring divine power into the flying dragon, she still could not stop it from going berserk.

'Kamito, this flying dragon is no good anymore. Its functionality as a militarized spirit has been completely destroyed —'

He heard Restia's voice in his mind.

(A roar that can destroy a militarized spirit's sanity, huh?)

This was Leviathan's anti-air defense system. If they had rushed over here on the Revenant, the spirit mechanism serving as the power source would most likely go out of control, resulting in tragedy.

'—I am dizzy.'

"Yeah, me too—"

Can sword spirits get dizzy? While that question crossed his mind, Kamito racked his brain.

At this rate, they were going to crash headlong into the ground.

"—Kamito!"

Just then, he heard a voice from above.

He looked up forcefully, only to see Ellis reaching out to him with everything she had while hugging her demon wind spirit's neck.

Apparently, as a high-tier spirit, Simorgh was not affected by the roar.

The opportunity only existed for a moment. Kamito reached out, caught her hand and took a leap.

The instant his entire body was in midair, he suddenly felt lighter. The wind from the spirit magic Ellis chanted had enveloped him.

Following that momentum, Ellis drew Kamito to her with a forceful tug.

"You saved me, Ellis—"

"Y-Yes..."

Ellis released his hand in a fluster, blushing intensely.

"Huaah, calm down, calm down!"

"Claire, I cannot do anything if you cling so tightly to me!"

Rinslet and Claire's flying dragon looked like it was going to crash any moment.

Ellis bent forward and yelled at the two girls.

"You two, look out for the right moment to jump! Kamito and I will catch you from below!"

"Ehhh!?" "No way, that is crazy!"

"Believe in us—"

Ellis directed Simorgh to make a tight turn.

"F-Fine..."

"Only choice is to take a gamble..."

As expected of these two, who had been through so many hellish battlefields.

Preparing themselves, they nodded and looked down calmly.

"Jump—Now!"

Ellis yelled.

In that instant, Claire and Rinslet jumped off the back of the berserk flying dragon.

Boom—With the rumbling, the wind produced from spirit magic caused the two girl to float lightly. With perfect timing, Simorgh positioned himself under them, allowing Ellis to catch Claire while Kamito caught Rinslet, pulling them safely over.

"...Ah, K-Kamito-san!?"

Rinslet instantly blushed to her ears when her face collided into Kamito's chest. Smelling a floral fragrance unique to girls, Kamito felt his heart racing too.

—At that moment, Simorgh severely lost balance while flying.

"Carrying four people is too much of a strain. We will land at that plaza."

"Yeah, got it—"

At Ellis' orders, Simorgh flapped his giant wings and landed at a wide open plaza.

"—You worked very hard, Simorgh."

Ellis stroked Simorgh's back to comfort him.

The demon wind spirit cawed several times then vanished into particles of light in the air. At the same time, the elemental waffe Ray Hawk appeared in Ellis' hand.

"...We are still some distance from Scorpia."

Claire turned her gaze to the towering palace, several buildings away.

"Yes, but not too far. We can rush there directly —"

"—But looks like it won't be that easy!"

Kamito shouted and severed the attacking tentacles.

Covered by countless tentacles, Zohar had taken the form of a demon city.

"...There is no human presence at all. What happened to all of the city's residents?"

Ellis spoke with a grave expression.

"Look at that—"

Claire pointed to the top of a building resembling a shrine.

Many objects resembling cocoons of various sizes were dangling from the roof, pulsating in a creepy manner.

"Don't tell me—"

"Yes, most likely Leviathan is using those cocoons to replenish itself with divine power from the residents..."

"All of those cocoons!?"

"How cruel...!"

Ellis exclaimed in anger.

"Can we not save them?"

"Unfortunately, saving them one by one will take forever..."

There was tranquil fury in Claire's eyes. She readied her flaming whip.

"So destroying Leviathan's core is the only choice huh..."

Presumably reacting to the divine power of Kamito's team, the writhing tentacles began to move actively.

"Time to charge — "

"Yes!"

Part 4

Just as Kamito's team had managed to invade Zohar...

Inside the Demon's Circuit responsible for controlling Leviathan, deep underground beneath Scorpia, a hellish scene was taking place.

"...Ah, gagagaga... Sjora... -sa, ma... Ahhhhhh!"

A young princess maiden in the middle of chanting a prayer vomited blood and collapsed on the magic circle on the ground. Squeezed dry of divine power, the young girl died just like that.

...The sixth one already. Including the first sacrifice, Valmira, she would be the seventh.

"Fufu, used up already huh? I must hurry to prepare the next sacrifice..."

Hierarch Sjora Kahn—no, the monster that used to be Sjora Kahn—looked down at the dead bodies of the princess maidens lying in the temple and smiled with joy.

A gigantic heart suspended in midair was beating vigorously.

This heart was the core of the strategic-class militarized spirit Leviathan.

Sjora Kahn was now merged with that core.

Half of her bewitchingly beautiful body of flesh was buried in the heart.

In order to control a weapon that was supposed to be operated by dozens of elementalists, even Sjora Kahn had no choice but to resort to such a method.

However, there were upsides to merging with Leviathan's core.

Due to shared senses, she was now aware of everything happening inside Zohar as though feeling it through the touch of her skin.

Indeed, for example, there was the intrusion of Ren Ashbell, the Demon King's successor —

"K-Kuku, how amusing... Our score from Ragna Ys can be settled here —"

Sjora Kahn's lips curled while she began to chant an incantation.

It was in High Ancient—a forbidden spell passed down the Demon King cult, very similar to the Soul Recall incantation that Rubia had recited underground of Ragna Ys during the past Blade Dance.

"Awaken here and now. Dark fallen ones sleeping in Zohar —"

Part 5

"— All of you, turn into charcoal!"

Claire swung the flaming whip, sweeping away the wriggling fleshy tentacles. In contrast to what she said, the flames were so strong that the tentacles were burnt away without even leaving charcoal behind, a far cry from her former power.

"W-What the heck did you do for training!?"

"It's not over. This isn't all I can do!"

Answering Kamito who was running beside her, Claire swung her whip hard again. The fiery slash at all directions destroyed countless incoming tentacles within the blink of an eye.

"Us too—" "We shan't fall behind!"

Ellis and Rinslet also readied their respective elemental waffen—

"Descend, the ice demon's frost-bound projectiles—Freezing Meteor!"

Automatically homing, countless ice projectiles rained down on the tentacles—

In the next instant, all the projectiles exploded, producing a spectacular bloom of ice flowers.

"Amazing—"

Kamito could not help but exclaim in admiration.

"Fufu, this is the result of my training at Dracunia!"

Rinslet tossed her hair proudly.

"I won't lose either—"

Saying that, Kamito was just about to pour divine power into his two swords.

"Kamito, you are the ultimate trump card. Conserve your divine power as much as possible."

However, Claire reminded him.

"Y-Yeah, got it—"

In fact, at the current rate, Kamito might not even have a chance to swing his swords.

Scorpia was visible at the end of the main road lined by countless cocoons. It was a building in foreign architectural style with a massive dome at the top.

"Over there huh!?"

Kamito concentrated divine power in his legs, kicked the ground and accelerated. Claire, Ellis and Rinslet also followed him closely.

"There is no army guarding the palace—"

"Probably like the people of the city, they were swallowed by Leviathan."

Just as Kamito replied...

CRAAAAASH!

"...!?"

Suddenly, a building by the road collapsed, producing a rain of debris over their heads—

"O wind of universal protection, guard us—Wind Shield!"

Just as they were about to be buried in debris, the spirit magic chanted by Ellis activated. Centered around Ellis' raised spear, a howling storm blew the debris away entirely.

"W-What!?" "What is going on!?"

Next, from behind the collapsed building, a gigantic arm slowly appeared.

"That's...!"

ROOOOOAAAAR!

The roar shook the atmosphere in the surroundings.

Boom—Shaking the ground as it walked was a giant humanoid spirit.

This was the Glasya-Labolas type tactical-class militarized spirit that Kamito had fought when he first arrived at the Academy. Compared to other militarized spirits, it was relatively easy to control and offered astounding strength, which is why Glasya-Labolas was used in many countries apart from Ordesia.

"...Tsk, this is troublesome."

Looking up at the giant towering over the dust cloud, Kamito groaned in the back of his throat.

A single one would not be too much a threat even if it was a tactical-class militarized spirit. Even though such a spirit would be very formidable for Academy students who had never experienced real combat, at least it was no match for Kamito, or the girls after they had improved from their training. However—

"...A-A large group is approaching!"

Claire cried out.

An army with as many as ten-odd giant spirits were stomping the ground, approaching.

Kamito poured power into the swords in his hands. Against so many militarized spirits, even Claire or the others would have trouble—

(...Tsk, no time to engage them slowly—)

However, Kamito's sword-gripping hand was stopped gently by Ellis.

"Ellis?"

"Leave this to me. You two go on ahead."

"But..."

"Do not worry. Whether myself or Simorgh, we have improved greatly after the training—"

Ellis smiled and set her spear elemental waffe on the ground.

"Although it severely consumes divine power, as long as the battle is settled quickly, this should be fine—"

Ellis closed her eyes. Immediately, her entire body glowed with divine power.

"...Th-This is!?"

"O demon wind spirit, exhibit thy true power! Elemental waffe, second form—Ray Hawk Ragna!"

Ellis shouted the words of releasing.

In that moment, the spear elemental waffe released blinding light, instantly transforming—

The spear's shaft was engraved with a spiral pattern resembling a whirlwind. Decoration resembling a holy bird's head appeared on the pommel. The sharp tip of the spear was split into three prongs like spreading wings, giving off sacred light.

"An elemental waffe's second form!?"

"Yes, this is the new power that Simorgh and I have mastered in our training!"

Ellis drew out the spear and twirled it once over her head. This ordinary motion summoned a fierce howling gale, sweeping away all surrounding debris.

"...S-So amazing—"

"Compared to the previous elemental waffe, it is on a completely different level..."

Next to the amazed Claire and Rinslet, Kamito was also very impressed in his heart.

Indeed, Ellis had made dramatic progress in both the quality and quantity of her divine power compared to before.

She had finally grown enough to draw out a top-tier demon wind spirit's true power.

With her ponytail fluttering in the wind, Ellis stood before the tactical-class militarized spirit.

Perhaps reacting to the intense divine power given off by Ellis—

ROOOOOOOAAAAAR!

The giant's eyes glowed red as it swung its massive arm down at Ellis.

"Ellis!"

Kamito rushed in front of Ellis, intending to protect her. However—

Ellis jumped up high and swung her spear elemental waffe.

Next—

"Pierce mine enemy, divine spear of punishment—Ray Hawk Ragna!"

The thrown spear traced out a straight line in the air, puncturing the giant spirit's chest!

The giant spirit's chest was ripped open, leaving a huge hole. However, as expected of a tactical-class militarized spirit, its durability far surpassed ordinary spirits. Hence, it was not completely destroyed yet.

However—

"—O vicious wind, rampage!"

Ellis yelled.

The spear embedded in the giant spirit's chest produced a whirlwind at its tip and started to spin at super high speed.

The howling wind instantly shaved away the giant spirit's armor, piercing its abdomen with residual momentum.

Crash!

The giant spirit collapsed on the ground, producing a cloud of dust.

"—No way, it pierced a militarized spirit's armor in one shot!?"

Kamito was speechless with surprise.

The power from that attack just now was enough to rival Leonora's dragon sword skills.

Having destroyed the giant spirit, Ray Hawk Ragna spun magnificently in the air before returning to the hand of Ellis on the ground.

"See that? Rinslet and I will manage against enemies of this level."

Spinning the spear in her hand deftly, Ellis said.

"We will handle this."

Saying that, Rinslet readied her magic bow of ice and tossed her hair.

Indeed, let alone student level, Ellis' power had far surpassed that of spirit knights.

Working together with Rinslet, who had similarly improved, they should be able to handle the situation here.

Thud, thud — The other giants were approaching.

"...Got it. We'll leave this to you two."

"Yes, rest assured." "I shall defeat all of them."

The two girls nodded with confident expressions.

"Let's go, Kamito —"

"Yeah!"

Under the cover of a rain of ice arrows, Kamito and Claire began to sprint.



Chapter 11 - Ghosts of the Demon Capital

Part 1

Zapzapzapzapzap—

Across the dusty desert, intense lightning erupted. The city walls of Zohar, the demon city that had merged with Leviathan, made contact with Mordis' barrier.

Incinerated by holy lightning, terrifying tentacles were struggling in pain.

"...It is working. This looks like it could buy a bit of time, Rubia-sama."

Standing on the city wall, Fianna turned her head back to look at Rubia.

"N-No—"

"...Eh?"

Looking past Fianna grimly, Rubia shook her head.

Fianna turned to face Zohar again.

—Within the blink of an eye, the tentacles that should have been destroyed regenerated again.

"...H-How could this be possible!?"

"Leviathan possesses extremely potent self-repair functionality. So a strategic barrier of this scale will not even manage to stall for time...?"

Fianna could sense a hint of anxiety in Rubia's tone of voice.

—The barrier only endured for several minutes.

"Fianna-sama, the barrier has been breached!"

A princess maiden keeping watch on the wall reported in almost a scream.

The regenerating tentacle clusters kept attacking the barrier relentlessly in spite of the holy light incinerating them, finally creating a large opening in the barrier. Once breached, the barrier would become brittle and quickly collapse in a chain reaction.

"...!"

Fianna bit her lip. Although she never expected to hold off the strategic-class militarized spirit with just a barrier alone —

(I never thought it would be breached in such short time —)

The gigantic dome-shaped barrier covering Mordis' surroundings vanished. The city's last defense line remaining were its walls of stone.

Covered with huge numbers of tentacles, Zohar's walls were approaching with a cloud of dust and sand in its wake.

"...! Collision incoming! Brace yourselves for the impact, everyone!"

Fianna shouted to the surrounding princess maidens.

Just as everyone on the wall crouched down —

BOOOOOOOOM!

Zohar's outer edge made contact with Mordis' city wall.

At the impact zone, entire pieces of the stone wall was gouged out. A watchtower was instantly smashed.

"Kyahhhh!"

Blown away by the impact, Fianna fell into the city from the wall.

The painful fall made her entire body hurt, preventing her from breathing for a moment.

(...How is everyone!?)

Pulling her hazy consciousness together, Fianna looked around her.

Like her, the princess maidens on the wall in charge of maintaining the barrier had been sent flying by the impact. Even standing was a challenge for them. Some of them were bleeding from the forehead, unconscious, while others were groaning in pain, the legs twisted in unnatural directions.

"...Ah, guh, ooh..."

"...Calm down. I shall heal you immediately!"

Intending to cast healing on them, Fianna began to recite spirit magic of the holy element.

—But at that moment...

A disgusting sound ripped through the air.

In the next instant, terrifying tentacles crawled over Mordis' city walls and attacked the immobilized princess maidens one after another.

"Kyahhhhhhh!" "Eek—!" "N-Noooooo!"

Screams of princess maidens sounded then disappeared immediately. Each tentacle tip opened its jaws wide, instantly swallowing a princess maiden whole.

"—O holy king, I implore thee to punish evildoers—Holy Edge!"

Against the incoming swarm of tentacles, Fianna used blades of spirit magic to rip them apart.

—However, this sort of resistance amounted to nothing more than a drop in the ocean against the flood of tentacles surging over the walls. The tentacles did not seem to moving under human control. It looked like they only attacked in response to the divine power in the princess maidens.

Escaping the blades of spirit magic, a few tentacles approached Fianna.

(...!)

Fianna could not help but close her eyes.

But in that instant—

"Not even time can escape a frozen fate, conflagrating flames of absolute zero—Frost Blaze!"

Howling blue flames of Elstein immediately destroyed the tentacles in one fell swoop.

"...! Rubia-sama..."

"Do not give up, Fianna Ray Ordesia—"

With Frost Blaze enveloping her left hand, she stood on the city wall.

That figure of hers, with long crimson hair fluttering in the wind—

Was the image of the ideal princess whom Fianna had idolized in the past.

"—Believe in your Demon King."

Part 2

Underfoot were vibrations that felt like the earth rumbling—

What they could hear were noises of battle behind them—

Kamito and Claire ran singlemindedly towards Scorpia.

"What kind of training did all of you go through in just a few days?"

Running, Kamito asked Claire beside him. Although he could tell from a glance that the girls were much stronger than before, he never expected the change to be this dramatic—

"Rather than training, I feel like I've conquered obstacles in my heart—"

"What do you mean?"

"Umm, it's hard to explain clearly... But, anyway, that's the gist of it."

"What do you mean, anyway...?"

Just as Kamito was puzzled, he heard Restia's voice in his mind.

'These girls had very powerful potential inside them in the first place. However, they each had a minor mental hangup, which obstructed them from communing with their spirit—'

"In other words, they released their hidden potential, huh?"

—Just then, a large gate appeared before the two of them as they ran along a main road.

This point onwards would be Scorpia territory.

"Kamito, I sense something repulsive."

"Yeah, I get what you mean..."

The two of them halted and swept their gazes around them.

At that moment, something unexpected happened.

The palace gate opened from inside with a heavy noise.

"...!?"

What came into view was a large garden on the other side of the gate.

In the center of the garden, something resembling dark miasma was prowling.

"What is that?"

As though answering the question posed by the frowning Claire—

The dark miasma shook violently and changed shape.

Then seven knights clad in pitch-black armor appeared.

They each drew their sword and prepared a stance. A single crimson eye glowed with eerie light under each helmet.

This image, like the incarnation of darkness, was something Kamito had seen before.

"...Could that be Nepenthes Lore!?"

He groaned from the back of his throat.

Nepenthes Lore was a monster wielding the Demon King's power during the Blade Dance, awakened by Restia. It had singlehandedly destroyed several national representative teams, even crushing the Knights of the Dragon Emperor led by Leonora.

Nepenthes Lore was a far more terrifying and powerful existence than the tactical-class militarized spirits earlier.

—And here were seven of such things.

"What the hell... Why is that dark monster...?"

'Nepenthes Lore is the result when a human ends up devoured by the Demon King's power. The Demon King cult preserved these dead bodies.

Sjora must have used the power of the Demon's Circuit to awaken these corpses...'

"...Th-That's cheating..."

Enveloped in dark miasma, the seven Nepenthes Lores moved silently to surround Kamito and Claire.

Readying their respective elemental waffen, Kamito and Claire stood back to back.

Next—

"Claire, *watch my back*—"

"Huh?"

Hearing what Kamito said, Claire exclaimed in surprise.

In the past, Kamito would usually say stuff like "please cover me" instead of "watch my back." Despite acknowledging Claire's power, he did not go so far as to entrust his back to others unconditionally. However —

"On my own, I'd get a bit overwhelmed. Didn't you train to become stronger?"

Right now, his comrades in Team Scarlet had progressed immensely. It was enough for Kamito, who had always fought alone, to entrust his back to them without worry.

"...V-Very well, leave it to me!"

Claire nodded happily then cracked her whip, Flametongue.

"...I'm going to use a *special move* I learned during my training. It'll take some time, but you'll be okay, right?"

"That move will work on Nepenthes Lore?"

"Yes."

Claire nodded.

"Got it, then until that move is ready, I'll guard your back —"

Kamito readied his two swords and faced off against the seven Nepenthes Lores.

Behind him, Claire began to recite words sounding like an incantation —
—In that instant, the dark miasma expanded all at once.

The miasma surging out from all over the Nepenthes Lores' bodies turned into whips, swinging all at once.

"...!?"

At the same time, Kamito and Claire jumped left and right respectively.
Stone tiles in the plaza were blown away, turning into a swamp of miasma.
With a terrifying roar, the seven Nepenthes Lores charged.

(...Tsk, they move so fast despite being so big!)

Kamito caused the divine power concentrated under his feet to explode, then swung the Demon Slayer at the Nepenthes Lore in front of him.

The pitch-black armor shattered, spurting dark miasma violently upwards. Although any contact with the dangerous miasma would result in divine power being stolen away, the ultimate sword spirit Est possessed anti-magic properties that could neutralize even that.

(First one down—)

Without even looking at the fallen enemy, Kamito immediately switched to his next action. Pouring divine power into the Vorpall Sword in reverse grip, he charged and aimed at another Nepenthes Lore's throat. Then —

"—Pierce, Vorpall Blast!"

He yelled. The jet-black demonic lightning instantly erupted from the blade, destroying the monster's head.

(That makes two!)

Kamito immediately turned around to aim at the next target. At that moment —

'—Not over yet, Kamito!'

Est warned.

"...!?"

Kamito hastily ducked down. The tip of a large sword instantly swept past the top of his head.

The sword was swung by the earlier Nepenthes Lore that had lost its head.

Clad in armor, a massive foot stomped at him. Kamito rolled on the ground and narrowly avoided getting his entire body crushed. Using his residual momentum, he stood up and jumped back.

The two Nepenthes Lores, which ought to have suffered fatal wounds, were attacking with their swords as though nothing had happened.

(Damn monsters —)

Kamito cursed under his breath.

(...So the only way to defeat them is to break them apart completely?)

To begin with, Kamito's sword skills were unsuited for fighting non-human enemies. The assassination skills he had learned at the Instructional School all aimed at vulnerabilities in the human body. In Greyworth's case, the sword skills she taught him were essentially anti-human moves for seizing victory at the Blade Dance. Of course, he did have moves such as Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance for hunting large targets, but they were too costly in terms of the physical strain and divine power consumption. Spending a great deal of divine power in the current situation could very well awaken Ren Ashdoll's power.

(...That being said, these aren't enemies I can take out while holding back.)

—After all, these things had been Demon King candidates in the past, just like Kamito. It was thanks to the power of the Crusaders spirit sealed in Milla Bassett's eye that Team Scarlet managed to defeat Nepenthes Lore last time.

While resetting his posture, Kamito glanced at Claire behind him. She must be preparing quite a powerful move. While nimbly dodging attacks from the miasma whips, she kept chanting her incantation.

Two Nepenthes Lores charged to attack Kamito.

Pouring divine power into his two swords, Kamito leaped.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Third Form, Alpha Variant—Shadowmoon Waltz, Major Double Turn."

This was a dual-wielding variation on the anti-army Shadowmoon Waltz. This was a new move innovated by Kamito on his own after his fight against Greyworth. Left and right, his two swords slashing all directions, he instantly chopped off all the arms of the Nepenthes Lores.

However, these were not fatal wounds. As conglomerations of dark miasma, Nepenthes Lore could easily repair the damaged parts.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Third Form, Beta Variant—"

He immediately turned his sword around, slicing horizontally through a Nepenthes Lore in one slash.

(—Is it taken out!?)

From the corner of his eye, he could see the Nepenthes Lore's body chopped in two. Although he did not know if it was defeated, at least it should not be as easy to regenerate as arms.

However—

'—Kamito, dodge!'

Restia's voice sounded in his mind.

No sooner had she spoken, the top half of the bifurcated Nepenthes Lore exploded.

The instantly expanding dark miasma was about to swallow Kamito.

(...! Crap—)

The dark miasma was troublesome stuff that would steal divine power from a single touch. If splashed by a large amount, Kamito's divine power would be consumed all at once, resulting in depletion. With that, the other source of divine power dormant inside Kamito—Ren Ashdoll's power—would awaken.

Kamito jumped, trying to evade—

However, the other Nepenthes Lore had regenerated its arms and caught Kamito's leg with a miasma whip.

(...!?)

In that instant...

"O flames, let a night of red descend upon the earth—Crimson Judgment."

Kamito's view was dyed all red.

The crimson blaze drowned out the darkness, instantly devouring the Nepenthes Lore's massive body completely.

"...What!?"

Kamito was rendered speechless, holding his breath. Could this current flame be—

—The blazing flames flickered intensely then began to take on the form of a petite young girl.

Appearing out from there was—

A beautiful girl with red hair, all her limbs enveloped in flames.

"The Scarlet Valkyrie—Ortlinde. I hereby manifest in this world, heeding the call to my true name."

Saying that, the cat-eared girl bowed her head respectfully with a serious expression on her face.

Part 3

"—Calm down! Everyone who can move, go repair the barrier!"

Standing on the collapsed city wall, Fianna shouted to encourage the princess maidens.

A back and forth battle was still taking place on the edge in contact with Zohar.

Leviathan's tentacles, swarming over the city wall, were starting to invade like a raging tide. Not satisfied with Zohar alone, it was probably planning to merge with Mordis as well. The rate of invasion was faster than expected.

(...Hmm, at this rate, even the town area will be devoured!)

Despite her summoned knight spirit swinging his great sword to chop down tentacles, her efforts were like droplets in the ocean.

"Fianna, retreat to the back. You are the monarch of Legitimate Ordesia. We cannot lose you here—"

"...! Rubia-sama..."

Rubia, standing shoulder to shoulder with her, was showing heavy signs of fatigue in her voice.

Having unleashed Frost Blaze continuously, her divine power was almost depleted.

In her prime, perhaps she could have burned away all the tentacles, but now—

"...Hurry... Leave this place to me—"

"No—"

"...What?"

"I have no wish to again become a princess protected by others—"

While using spirit magic to suppress the surging tentacles, Fianna replied.

Her sunset-colored eyes gazed straight at Zohar, where Kamito's team had headed.

"I will believe in Kamito-kun—I will believe in my comrades and fight here."

She could not allow herself to retreat at this juncture, to repay her comrades for accepting her into Team Scarlet back when she was completely useless, not even capable of using spirits normally.

"...You have always had a stubborn side to you."

Rubia shrugged helplessly with a wry smile.

"Oh, Rubia-sama? Did you just smile?"

"..."

Faced with Fianna who was staring at her in great surprise, Rubia looked away.

...Seeing her react like that, Fianna chuckled. How long ago was the last time she had seen this senior princess maiden smile—?

"We must not allow it to invade the town area. Intercept it here."

"Yes!"

Part 4

"Scarlet..."

Seeing the girl who had appeared before his eyes, Kamito exclaimed in surprise.

The Scarlet Valkyrie—Ortlinde.

According to Restia, she was one of the spirit weapons rampaging during the Spirit War, a survivor of the thirteen-strong Valkyrie Series.

"It has been a while since we last met in this form. Master's master —"

Shapeshifted into human form, Scarlet bowed respectfully again. Although the title of master's master bothered Kamito a bit, sigh, now was not the time to care about it—

Kamito turned to Claire.

"Claire, so you're able to release Scarlet's true name now."

"...Y-Yes... Except it is still very... draining..."

Panting, Claire made a slight thumbs up.

This was the "special move" she had learned during her training at Dracunia—

Indeed, there was nothing more reliable than this.

Before the primordial spirit weapon's aura of overwhelming power, the Nepenthes Lores seemed wary and stopped moving.

With a twitch of her cat ears, the flames all over Ortlinde's body instantly blazed violently.

"—Very well, time to start the extermination, master."

"Yes..."

Just as Kamito readied his two swords again...

A roar resounded all around, sounding like it came from deep underground.

(...What!?)

Feeling a terrifying and strong presence, Kamito held his breath.

With likewise nervous expressions, Claire and Scarlet observed their surroundings. Then...

In the center of the vast garden, a mass of dark miasma, terrifying and dense, began to slowly take on human form.

"...M-More of them!?"

"No, that's—"

Kamito stared intently at the solidification of miasma.

The darkness coalesced into the shape of a slender human, smaller than Nepenthes Lore.

Covered by pitch-black darkness, it looked like a shadow that would disappear any moment.

However—

(—This guy *is no ordinary monster.*)

Kamito knew instinctively. A chill coursed through him, making his entire body tremble.



On the face of that flickering shadow, a pair of crimson eyes lit up, glowing with ominous light.

'—No way, even *something like that* has been awakened!?'

"...! You know him, Restia?"

'Yes, this was the strongest Demon King candidate, born in the Holy Kingdom seven hundred years ago—'

Black lightning erupted from the Vorpall Sword in his hand as though issuing a warning.

"...!?"

The dark shadow calmly raised its sword.

Judging from that stance, that motion and behavior, Kamito felt a sense of familiarity.

(That movement, could it be—!?)

'—Avril *Ciel Mais*, the Sword Saint.'

No sooner had she spoken than the shadow vanished.

Chapter 12 - Absolute Blade Asura

Part 1

The slash, executed with divine speed, flashed by.

Had he dodged slightly slower, Kamito's neck would have been severed from his body.

A shallow scratch left a trail of blood on his cheek.

Kamito was able to react in time only because he knew that move, not because he read the enemy's sword.

Despite minor differences from what Kamito understood, that move was undoubtedly—

"...I can't believe it's Purple Lightning of the Absolute Blade Arts!?"

Kamito was speechless.

Why did this kind of monster know how to use the Absolute Blade Arts, which had supposedly been passed down a single line of masters and disciples—

No wait, Restia had already hinted at the answer.

Avril Ciel Mais, the Sword Saint.

That was what Restia had called the monster.

"Ciel Mais"—In spirit language, this was a term meaning "one who has devoted their life to the sword." Although not to the point of ubiquitous, it was not a rare family name among nobles. However, it was probably not mere coincidence that this thing shared the same family name as *her* .

"...Tell me, Restia, who exactly was that guy?"

Brushing away the blood on his cheek, Kamito finally spoke.

'Avril Ciel Mais was the Sword Saint born in the Holy Kingdom of Lugia. A legendary figure who had attained the pinnacle of swordsmanship. He was the founder of the Absolute Blade Arts used by the Dusk Witch, and like you, he was also a Demon King candidate who had inherited Ren Ashdoll's power—'

"The founder of the Absolute Blade Arts...!?"

Kamito widened his eyes.

He had heard Greyworth mention having a mentor before. This included the fact that the Absolute Blade Arts were always passed on to a single pupil, inherited generation after generation throughout history...

If the founder was this dark monster in front of him right now—

"Then Greyworth is the descendant of a Demon King candidate?"

'It is unknown whether she is a direct descendant or not. After all, the name of Ciel Mais is equivalent to a title of supreme swordsmanship. It is also possible that the witch took on that title on her own. However—'

At this point, Restia paused.

'Regardless, it would be best if you treated him as being on an entirely different level compared to the Nepenthes Lore that Rubia Elstein awakened on Ragna Ys. Demon King Solomon aside, he is the man closest to the Demon King—'

"..."

Kamito readied his two swords to face off against the pitch-black shadow.

The ancient Sword Saint's sword pressure was extraordinary even as a Demon King candidate among the Nepenthes Lores.

Unlike the other Nepenthes Lores, one could sense there was a clear mind behind that pair of crimson eyes.

(How ironic. I can't believe I ran into the founder of my *master's* swordsmanship—)

The dark Sword Saint—Avril Ciel Mais—quietly readied his sword.

While directing his gaze at the enemy before him, Kamito said to Claire:

"Claire, leave this guy to me."

"Will you be alright?"

Claire asked worriedly. Her excellent intuition had noticed that this Nepenthes Lore was on a completely different dimension compared to the others.

"Yeah. A user of the Absolute Blade Arts can only be defeated by another user of the Absolute Blade Arts. Also—"

Saying that, Kamito glared at the enemy before him.

"That's an opponent I need to settle things with—"

—Yes, despite an appearance that changed into that of a monster, this was the founder of the Absolute Blade Arts.

Unless he defeated him, there was no way he could prevail against Greyworth who had recovered her prime.

Kamito did not know if Claire sensed his resolve, but she nodded obediently.

"Understood. Then I'll leave it to you. Scarlet and I will take care of the other Nepenthes Lores."

"Yeah, counting on you—"

"Leave it to me, master's master."

Ortlinde skillfully spun the great flaming scythe in her hand.

"Wait, Scarlet, what is 'master's master' supposed to mean?"

When Claire asked in curiosity, Scarlet meowed and avoided eye contact.

ROOOOOAAAAAR!

The dark Sword Saint's roar was filled with resentment.

In order to oppose the resulting sword pressure, Kamito covered himself with divine power.

"Let me try and see whether my sword skills are good enough—"

Kicking the ground, he accelerated all at once.

"Absolute Blade Arts, First Form—Purple Lightning!"

A flash of the sword, a shower of sparks.

The dark Sword Saint readied his sword, blocking the Absolute Blade Art executed by Kamito with godlike speed.

"—As expected of the Sword Saint. However, this move was just to pay you back for just now."

Grinning savagely, Kamito immediately swung his sword again.

The Demon Slayer and the Vorpal Sword—Using the strongest elemental waffen, he unleashed a raging tide of consecutive strikes.

—However, the dark Sword Saint was still able to parry them away with flowing motions.

R-ROOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAR...!

Avril howled.

That voice sounded both resentful and delighted. It was joy for finally encountering opponent equally matched opponent in swordsmanship after hundreds of years. Even after turning into this kind of monster, his heart still harbored pride for having dedicated a lifetime to the way of the sword. Kamito could feel it.

However —

"Sorry, I don't have time to enjoy a blade dance with you —"

Kamito advanced in one breath, swinging the Demon Slayer glowing silver white.

It was unknown how long Fianna and the others could last in their defensive battle at Mordis. The longer the battle here dragged on, the greater the damage within the city.

"—Hehehe, gimme my graduation certificate!"

With a flurry of slashes and the howling of slicing wind, the clashing of steel sounded repeatedly.

As expected, his sword style was the same as Greyworth's.

(...Their swordsmanship is virtually on the same level, huh?)

Kamito professed admiration in his heart.

Purely in terms of swordsmanship, Greyworth was the only one so far who could match Kamito. Whether Leonora, Paladin Luminaris or Lurie Lizaldia of the Numbers, all of them were inferior to him —

However, this monster that bears the name of Ciel Mais —

Kamito swung his two swords but was blocked by the sword enveloped in dark miasma.

Avril's crimson eyes seemed to tremble with joy.

In the next instant, a wall of dark miasma appeared, surrounding the two of them who were locked in a duel of swords.

"...! What the heck are you planning?"

While the two of them continued to clash blades, vying for supremacy, Kamito asked the shadow before his eyes. On the other, he never expected to get an answer —

'— This is a wall of miasma. It looks like he hopes for a one-on-one duel with you.'

"...I see."

A two-man arena where no one could interfere.

Whether Claire or Scarlet, or the other Nepenthes Lores —

At the same time, escaping was impossible too.

Kamito gritted his teeth and smiled fearlessly.

"Got it, I'll fight you to the bitter end, just as you wish. However, I'll be settling this quick!"

Part 2

"...! Kamito!?"

Seeing a dark wall swirl around Kamito, Claire almost screamed.

While dodging the attacking tentacles of Nepenthes Lore, she unleashed the spirit magic of Fireball against the quivering wall of miasma.

Her attack landed but did not explode. The wall of miasma absorbed the Fireball.

"What is with that wall..!?"

"Master, that is a barrier of darkness miasma. Hence, it will devour all spirit magic—"

Scarlet blocked a Nepenthes Lore's sword with her flaming scythe. The point of contact with the pitch-black sword was immediately corrupted.

"Oh no—"

Three Nepenthes Lores released tentacles of darkness together.

Claire and Ortlinde dodged at the same time by jumping left and right respectively.

"Let us believe in Kamito-sama and survive the trial here—"

"Yes!"

Dodging the endless stream of attacks, Claire fired a Fireball.

An attack of three consecutive hits. The flames struck Nepenthes Lore's armor directly, causing a great explosion.

However, attacks of this level achieved nothing more than diversions. Claire understood that too. All Claire could manage as she was now was cover Scarlet, the one with enough firepower to exterminate them.

"Go forth and dance, the crimson flames summoning destruction — Hell Blaze!"

Towards the howling storm of the explosion, Claire unleashed what could be called the strongest fire-type spirit magic.

Scorching flames, capable of melting even rock, swallowed Nepenthes Lore. Next—

"O flames, may a night of red descend upon the world — Crimson Judgment!"

Swinging a fiery scythe, Scarlet unleashed a powerful move.

Enveloped in a crimson blaze, the Nepenthes Lore instantly vanished without trace.

"...Still, five more... Kuh—"

Clutching her chest, Claire fell on her knees.

As expected, Scarlet's human form was extremely draining of divine power.

"Master!"

Scarlet called out.

Apparently, Claire's contracted spirit had sensed her exhaustion through their spirit seal.

(...I'm not done yet... I made my decision to fight alongside Kamito...)

Claire stood up while panting.

(Also, I am tasked with the mission Nee-sama assigned me...!)

Part 3

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Inside the towering wall of darkness—

Kamito and the ghost of Sword Saint Avril were clashing blades intensely.

"Go forth and pierce, all-annihilating demon lightning of punishment—
Vorpall Blast!"

The jet-black lightning released from the Vorpall Sword poured all over
Avril.

However, it inflicted almost no damage to Avril. Against Nepenthes Lore's
elemental affinity of darkness, Est's anti-magic properties seemed to be
more effective.

'—Kamito, I will switch to support. Use Miss Sacred Sword as your main
offense.'

"Got it—"

At Restia's suggestion, Kamito redistributed the divine power assigned to
the Vorpall Sword over to Est.

'Are you sure, darkness spirit—'

'Yes. In exchange, please yield to me the right to sneak into his bed.'

'Unacceptable—'

Est instantly replied. Kamito really wished that they did not engage in this
sort of rights transaction negotiation in the middle of battle.

The Demon Slayer in Kamito's hand glowed with silver-white radiance.

Next—

ROOOOOAAAAAAR— —!

Avril roared. In that instant, Kamito smelled an intense stench of death and hastily jumped to the side.

Three flashes of the sword swept by. The tip of the blade brushed against his forehead, instantly messing up his bangs.

Absolute Blade Arts—Most likely the prototype of Shadowmoon Waltz. Kamito managed to dodge this move purely because he knew its motions.

The prototype's movement of the sword was not as refined as Greyworth's swordsmanship, but as a result, it caused Kamito's judgment to be off by a little.

(...! Crap!)

Seizing the opportunity when Kamito lost balance, Avril's sword went straight for the opening.

Kamito hastily blocked using the Vorpall Sword in his left hand, but—

In that instant, a scorching sensation of pain coursed through his body with a sizzling sound.

His back had touched the darkness barrier

"...Guh, ooh...!"

Gritting his teeth to bear the intense pain, Kamito mustered all his strength to hold his ground.

(As expected, he's pretty strong...)

Kamito's forehead broke out in cold sweat.

Despite a body that had turned into a corpse, his superb swordsmanship remained intact.

Before Kamito's eyes was not some random monster but a genuine master of the sword.

—But at the same time, another thought crossed Kamito's mind. Even for a master who had attained such a height, a man crowned with the title of the Sword Saint, he still succumbed to Ren Ashdoll's power, turning into this kind of monster.

Holding his sword in both hands, Avril attacked Kamito fiercely. It was probably the prototype of Crushing Fang, the Absolute Blade Art for destroying weapons—

(Now is the time—)

Instantly, Kamito lowered his stance and released in one go the divine power accumulated at his feet.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Seventh Form—Biting Dragon!"

What he used was an Absolute Blade Art developed from the thrusting move of Purple Lightning, an attack for sending the enemy upwards.

Enveloped in miasma, Sword Saint Avril was launched into the air.

Jumping into the air, Kamito instantly reversed his sword stance.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Second Form—Meteor!"

Pouring all of his divine power into the Demon Slayer, he swung.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

With the sound of an explosion, the ground was gouged up, producing a cloud of dust.

"...H-Huff, huff, huff—"

Consecutive usage of the Absolute Blade Arts, twice in a row, was too great a burden for the body.

'—Kamito, it will be dangerous if you recklessly strained yourself any further. My power will not be enough to keep things suppressed.'

Hearing Restia's warning...

"Yeah, I know..."

Kamito answered urgently.

The divine power inside him was in disarray. His control over divine control was gradually getting more difficult.

At this rate—

Just then, the dust settled and a shadow enveloped in miasma slowly stood up.

"So even that didn't work..."

Kamito's throat twitched.

In terms of swordsmanship, the two of them were virtually equal. However, the opponent possessed an immortal body after being transformed into Nepenthes Lore. Furthermore, the enemy also had a massive advantage in the quantity of overall divine power.

At the current rate of divine power consumption, he could very well end up devoured by the power of darkness.

However, this was not an opponent that he could defeat while holding back.

(I've got to decide the match in the next attack—)

Kamito gripped the Demon Slayer tightly.

Part 4

"—The third barrier has been breached!"

"It's no good. We can't sustain this any longer—Kyahhh!"

Screams of princess maidens came through the spirit crystal communicator then disappeared, accompanied by the sound of static. Similar reports were coming from everywhere above the city wall.

(It is only a matter of time for my current location too...)

Fianna bit her lip tightly.

Positioned at the zone in contact with Zohar, she was responsible for the place that was being invaded the most violently. Although the barrier was still holding up, just barely, if any more barriers at other checkpoints were to be destroyed, the entire defense line would probably collapse like an avalanche.

"...Kamito-kun...!"

Fianna clasped her hands together like praying, thinking about Kamito who was in enemy territory.

She had faith in him. But even with faith, she still could not change the fact that she worried.

Behind Fianna, Rubia spoke:

"Fianna, this place is not going to hold. Retreat to the Demon's Fist and re-establish the defense line—"

"But if we do that, Mordis' town area will—"

"Cannot be helped. Giving up the outskirts is the only recourse. At least it is better than getting wiped out here—"

Rubia spoke with a calm expression. However, there was heavy fatigue on her countenance.

Indeed, she was correct. At this rate, the defense line was going to collapse.

"...U-Understood, I will direct the princess maidens maintaining the barrier to retreat—"

Just as Fianna was going to give orders using the spirit crystal for communications...

"—no good—The fourth barrier..."

"...!?"

The voice was suddenly cut off.

In that instant, the weakened barrier was destroyed. A swarm of tentacles surged in all at once.

"Kyahhhhhhhhh!" "Nooooooooooooo!"

Entangled by the tentacles, the princess maidens were swallowed into massive cocoons one after another.

(...No way!?)

The surge of Leviathan's tentacles resembled a tide. Just as Georgios, in the middle of guarding the princess maidens, was about to be devoured all at once—

"Georgios...!"

A second before the tentacles were about to devour Fianna...

A light flashed past, sweeping across Zohar with city wall and the tentacles in its path.

(...Huh?)

With the sound of a deafening explosion, a gigantic pillar of fire rose up, instantly vaporizing the tentacles.

The atmosphere was shaking. Fragments and debris that had been tossed up began to fall in succession.

"What on earth happened —"

No sooner had she spoken, having fallen on the ground due to the impact, Fianna noticed a gigantic shadow overhead on top of her.

She looked up forcefully, only to see —

A fortress ruling the sky.

Layers upon layers of defensive armor. A spirit crystal reactor glowing with red. In addition, there were countless gunports fitted all over the body —

Velsaria Eva, clad in a fortress spirit's Elemental Panzer.

"Velsaria, you made it in time, huh —"

Rubia spoke.

"I apologize for the delay. Modifications took a substantial amount of time —"

The visor covering her head opened to reveal Velsaria's face.

The fortress spirit fired thrusters while slowly descending, landing on the city wall.

Crash—Under the great weight of the heavy defensive armor, part of the city wall collapsed.

To protect Fianna and the others, collapsed on the ground, she stepped in front of the continuously regenerating tentacles and declared loudly:

"Upon the name of the Fahrengart Knights, and upon the honor of the Sylphid Knights of Areishia Spirit Academy, I shall see to it that none shall pass another step forward. Anyone who wishes to conquer Mordis must defeat this Silent Fortress first!"

In that instant, all the gunports all over her body opened. The fortress spirit's super firepower attacked all at once.

Tentacles were torn apart, shredded in the explosion. One after another, the cocoons that had swallowed princess maidens fell to the ground, containing silhouettes of girls all covered in slime.

"Princess, now is the time to reconstruct the barrier —"

"...! Understood!"

Fianna nodded and shouted to the remaining princess maidens.

"—It is not over yet. Trust in our Demon King and hold our ground here!"

Part 5

The Demon Slayer held in Kamito's hand glowed with even more intense silver-white light.

'Kamito, your divine power consumption is too intense —!'

Restia's voice was almost a scream.

"...Sorry, hang in there... just a little longer —!"

Feeling his heart pounding violently, Kamito poured in more divine power. He could already feel Ren Ashdoll's power invading him. Gripped tightly in his left hand, the Vorpall Sword crackled and gave off jet-black lightning. Restia was doing everything she could to suppress the power of darkness. ...I can't waste any more time here.

For the sake of Ellis and Rinslet, as well as Fianna and the others protecting the town, not to mention Claire and Scarlet who were desperately buying time for him, and —

The refugees of Mordis, trusting in the impostor Demon King —

ROOOOOOAAAAAAR!

The dark Sword Saint — Avril Ciel Mais — roared and charged at him. He released a great deal of dark miasma, probably due to sensing Kamito's divine power expand all at once.

"Come, use your strongest move —"

Kamito closed his eyes for a moment, biding his time for that exact instant.

Then he took a step forward.

Kamito was waiting. Waiting for his opponent to unleash the most powerful Absolute Blade Art.

Accompanied by a whirlwind, flashes of the sword were released.

It was the prototype of the sword skill for taking out large spirits — The Destructive Form, Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance.

In this world, there existed only one move capable of countering this skill.

And the Sword Saint probably did not know of it. The existence of a move for countering the most powerful sword skill —

After all, the Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance was the most powerful move that could be mastered by an ultimate user of the Absolute Blade Arts.

There was no need to create an extra sword skill capable of countering it.

Hence, this was an Absolute Blade Art created not by the founder, but by a successor then inherited —

"—This is my farewell to you, Avril Ciel Mais!"

Absolute Blade Arts, Final Form—Last Strike.

This was the ultimate mystic technique that Greyworth had sacrificed her career as an elementalist in order to pass on.

A blinding silver-white flash sliced the dark Sword Saint cleanly into two.

Kamito did not look back. He knew without having to look back.

"...Magni... ficent..."

From behind, he heard that one word.

Next, immediately, the ultimate Nepenthes Lore—Sword Saint Avril Ciel Mais—turned into pitch-black ash and scattered.

Kamito bowed his head in apparent respect for the Sword Saint —

"Guh—"

Suddenly, he stabbed his swords into the ground and fell on his knees.

"Ah... Guh, ahhhhhhhhhhhhh...!"

As though to replenish his depleted divine power, the power of darkness swallowed Kamito.

Part 6

A crimson slash tore through the air. A Nepenthes Lore was destroyed as a result.

These were the Scarlet Valkyrie's flames of purgatory that had shaken Astral Zero in the past—

"—Are you alright, Master?"

Worried about Claire's consumption, Scarlet inquired.

"...Y-Yes, I can still... go on..."

With sweat dripping from her forehead, Claire forced herself to remain calm.

Ellis, Rinslet and Fianna had all made dramatic progress.

(...As the team captain, I can't lose to them!)

—At that moment...

From inside, a flash of light slashed the barrier that ejected all external interference—

It was a blinding flash of light, intense enough to penetrate the barrier. This was the light of released divine power.

(...Kamito!?)

Claire was stunned.

She recalled what she had heard from her sister just prior to setting off on their mission.

The light was so bright. If he were to use this much divine power, Kamito's body would —

"—! Kamito!"

Claire ran towards the darkness barrier.

Before setting off from Mordis, Claire had heard from her sister about the power of darkness invading Kamito's body.

Currently, Darkness Elemental Lord Ren Ashdoll's power was eating away at Kamito. As soon as he used too much divine power, Kamito would be devoured by the power of darkness, turning him into the likes of Nepenthes Lore.

Est alone was massive drain of divine power already. Now in addition to that, there was the darkness spirit's demon sword. Even if Kamito's divine power was extraordinary, using two such spirits simultaneously would swiftly deplete him.

Her sister had said so, if that were to happen —

'You must save that man as the Demon King's princess maiden —'

It was rumored that princess maidens with strong bonds with the Demon King were able to promote the circulation of his power.

Like at the Blade Dance, Claire managed to return Kamito to normal through a kiss —

You should be able to do it — She had said.

In front of the towering barrier of darkness, Claire halted.

Even though the Nepenthes Lore responsible for putting it up was gone, the barrier showed no signs of disappearing.

"Why..."

Claire felt a burning pain as soon as she touched the barrier, stealing her divine power immediately.

"...! What should I do...?"

On the other side of barrier, Kamito was suffering.

At this rate, he might end up devoured by the power of darkness just as her sister had explained —

Claire hesitated for a moment then committed her resolve.

(...My only choice is to use End of Vermilion to crack it open by force.)

—The true flame of Elstein should be capable of destroying this barrier that absorbed spirit magic.

She had no idea whether she would be able to manage it while sustaining Ortlinde, but—

She focused her awareness into her palm to create a tiny fire.

The flames then enveloped her entire body. In this manner, she walked into the barrier of darkness.

"...Ahhhhhhhh...!"

Intense pain and severe fatigue attacked her entire body.

A moan bordering on a scream leaked out from her, Claire advanced.

(...Kamito...)

Her consciousness began to fade. Even so, her feet did not stop.

"Ah, guh, ahhhhhhhh...!"

She could see Kamito's figure on the other side of the barrier.

Kamito was kneeling on the ground, clutching his head in his hands, groaning in pain.

"Wait for me, Kamito... I'll be, right there..."

Passing through the barrier, Claire gently hugged the head of the suffering Kamito.

Her sister had said that there would be no effect unless she connected with the Demon King through her bond with him.

Hence —

(...Kamito, I love you... I love you so much.)

Carrying the feelings she had always kept hidden, she kissed him.

Part 7

"—to... Kamito...!"

Red hair brushed against his cheek.

As soon as Kamito woke up, the first thing he saw was Claire's face.

"...Clai... re...?"

"Kamito, thank goodness...!"

Claire felt relieved and exhaled deeply, sitting down on the spot.

Kamito slowly sat up. His body felt very light. By the time he realized, Ren Ashdoll's power had vanished. Divine power akin to burning flames began to circulate inside him.

It greatly resembled the divine power that Rubia had poured into him at the purification facility in Mordis.

"Ah, uh... Umm, well, so... Nee-sama said, doing this, could save you—"

Claire murmured with her face bright red.

Finally, Kamito realized what had happened.

It was identical to the time when he rescued Fianna at the imperial capital. Kamito's Ren Ashdoll power was poured into Claire while at the same time, Claire's divine power also flowed into Kamito's body.

The soft sensation continued to linger on his lips.

Looking at Claire, Kamito saw Claire's cheeks turn increasingly bright red.

"...Claire, thanks a lot. I'm okay now."

Wielding his two swords, Kamito slowly stood up. Even though his divine power had recovered to some extent, due to executing Last Strike, his entire body's muscles were groaning in pain.

A swing of the Demon Slayer infused with divine power completely annihilated the miasma barrier.

Outside the barrier, Scarlet was locked in an intense battle against three Nepenthes Lores.

"Leave this to me, you two. Please head over to stop Leviathan first."

Scarlet spoke while swinging her massive scythe.

"Will you be okay, Scarlet?"

Hearing that, Claire asked worriedly.

Even Scarlet looked like she could not avoid getting tired. The flames on her body had grown smaller.

"I am a Spirit Weapon and can operate autonomously to a certain extent. Once the Demon's Circuit providing divine power to these ghosts is destroyed, they will not be able to sustain themselves any longer."

"...Understood."

Claire nodded then ran over to Scorpia, which was exuding an ominous atmosphere.

The Nepenthes Lores intended to chase Kamito and CLaire, but Scarlet blocked their path, wielding her massive scythe.

The flames enveloping her limbs began to surge intensely.

This was the power of Ren Ashdoll that had flowed into Claire's body.

"But forget about stalling for time, I might very well defeat them directly —"

Part 8

Breaking the closed door and charging into Scorpia —

What greeted Kamito and Claire was a scene from hell.

"...!"

Claire widened her eyes and was compelled to cover her mouth with her hands.

Inside the palace, countless tentacles were crawling around like blood vessels, pulsating eerily.

No patrolling soldiers or ladies-in-waiting could be seen inside. There were not a single sign of humans.

None of those things that wrapped up humans into cocoons could be found anywhere.

(...Has everyone evacuated, or—)

The speculation surfacing in Kamito's mind made him nauseous.

Most likely, this palace was the first place to merge with Leviathan.

In other words, all the people inside the palace had already been—

"...Let's go, Claire."

"Yes..."

Kamito and Claire nodded calmly, slicing their way through tentacles while charging into the depths of the palace.

"Restia, can you figure out where that Demon's Circuit device is located?"

While running, Kamito asked the demon sword at his waist.

'Yes, at the very back of the Hierarch's Hall where state-level ceremonies are conducted, there should be a passage leading to underground military facilities—'

"—Got it."

Kamito drew out the Vorpall Sword and incinerated tentacles to oblivion using jet-black demon lightning.

Traversing the palace that had turned into the interior of Leviathan's body, they reached the Hierarch's Hall where a giant magic circle had been drawn on the floor.

As expected—

At the very back was a tightly shut metal door.

"Kamito, what is this!?"

Claire cried out in alarm.

Hearing that, Kamito soon noticed. He had seen it before, something similar to this door.

At the deepest part underground of the mine town Gado, Kamito and team had seen the same kind of door.

However, unlike that door, which had the Darkness Elemental Lord's emblem scratched off, this door had the Five Elemental Lords' emblem erased.

"...!"

Suddenly, Claire clutched her head and collapsed on the spot as though she were dizzy.

"Claire, are you okay?"

"...Kami... to... Inside here, is something extremely powerful..."

Claire responded in a semi-moan.

Hailing from the same lineage, Claire had inherited talent as a princess maiden. Most likely, she had felt the presence of the strategic-class militarized spirit that had stolen divine power from the residents of Zohar, thus stunning her as a result.

"—Est, are you able to destroy that door?"

'—Yes, Kamito.'

Est replied.

Kamito readied the glowing Demon Slayer then swung at the sealed door in one breath.

The door was shattered to reveal a mass of viscous darkness occupying the interior.

The walls were covered by flesh resembling mucous membranes, pulsating nonstop. Kamito used the Demon Slayer's glow for illumination and the walls of flesh trembled as though in fear.

"Is this place the Demon's Circuit...?"

'No, its location is even lower down—'

Restia replied.

"...Hmm, I feel a bit dizzy."

"Yeah, me too."

Stepping into the darkness, Kamito felt a serious sense of fatigue.

A moment's carelessness and one could very well lose consciousness here.

'Your divine power will be stolen simply by staying here—'

"Looks like we need to hurry."

Kamito and Claire quietly descended the staircase leading underground.

—After who knew how many levels...

Having spent a long time in the darkness, almost about to faint, they finally reached the end of the staircase.

Next was a passage leading to yet another door.

"Let's go, Kamito—"

"Yeah..."

Once again, Kamito poured divine power into the Demon Slayer and destroyed the door.

Then—

"...!?"

The first to come into view was the red color covering the floor completely.

Confronted with the most horrific sight, Kamito covered his mouth and Claire was forced to turn her face away.

What had dyed the floor red was a great volume of blood.

Inside the crimson sea of blood were the bodies of princess maidens who had been drained of life energy. No one was breathing, everyone were dead.

"W-What is this..."

Claire's voice trembled. She tightly clutched Kamito's arm in apparent fear.

Most likely, these princess maidens were the ones who had released Leviathan's seal.

At this moment—

"—How splendid, Demon King's successor. To think you even managed to vanquish the Sword Saint of antiquity."

Inside the vast triangular space, an elderly and hoarse voice was heard.

"...!?"

Kamito looked up forcefully and raised the glowing Demon Slayer.

Only to see at the very top of the equilateral triangular room—

The figure of Sjora Kahn, the Theocracy's princess.

"Sjora!?"

Claire cried out in surprise.

Having lost her seductive good looks, Sjora was now all skin and bones, exhibiting none of her former glamor. In addition, her lower half was merged with a beating crimson heart.

"My original plan was to wipe out the rebel army gathered at Mordis and absorb their divine power. Never did I expect you people to be present —"

Sjora Kahn's crimson lips curled up to show a terrifying grin.

"Prepare yourself, Sjora Kahn. For the crimes of using a strategic-class militarized spirit and slaughtering your own countrymen, your atrocities will be tried and punished by the international court!"

Raising her flaming whip, Claire shouted.

"It matters not. *We* shall concede our defeat on this occasion. This Zohar can be yielded to you lot too. However, a mere city of this sort does not count as any heavy setback. Accept it as a present for celebrating the revival of the true Demon King. K-Kukukuku, kuhahahahahah!"

Sjora's mocking laughter resounded all around. The sound did not resemble her sultry voice known to Kamito and company, instead, it was more akin to the laughter of old men.

In the next instant, together with the gigantic beating heart that she had merged with, Sjora's body slid down lightly, falling at the feet of Kamito and Claire.

"...What!?"

Kamito was speechless.

Sjora Kahn. The girl known as the Theocracy's witch—

With a creepy smile on her face, she breathed her last breath.

"Leviathan stole all her divine power."

Claire murmured quietly.

"To think the Theocracy's princess met this kind of demise..."

"Yeah... But in the end, she said stuff that bothers me..."

The revival of the true Demon King... What on earth did that mean?

"Maybe it's a legend in the Demon King's cult or something. Let's investigate it later."

"..."

Kamito looked up to the ceiling of the equilateral triangular room.

Having lost Sjora, its controller, the heart—Leviathan's core—continued to beat. As long as this thing existed, Leviathan would probably keep absorbing divine power nonstop.

With the Demon Slayer readied, Kamito aimed at the still active heart.

"Est, I'm counting on you. Finish this—"

'Yes, Kamito—'

While Est's voice sounded in his mind, the Demon Slayer's blade gave off silver-white light.

Kamito swung the sacred sword directly, slicing the heart in two.

Epilogue

As red as blood, the setting sun sank below the vast desert horizon.

Merged with Leviathan, Zohar stopped in the midst of biting into Mordis' city wall, looking like the remains of a city —

Swallowed in cocoons to supply divine power, the many citizens were all rescued by Rubia's forces and Fianna's healing team.

However, the people located at Leviathan's core region, in Scorpia's vicinity, were totally drained of divine power and had stopped breathing.

Even though exact numbers were unclear yet, at least hundreds of civilians were estimated to have been sacrificed.

Fianna was at the shrine, offering a requiem dance for the deceased.

Muir and Lily were found near the city wall, unconscious.

They had apparently come into contact with the moving Zohar during reconnaissance and ended up swallowed by tentacles. The only reason why the two of them remained unharmed was presumably because Leviathan disliked Muir Alenstarl's unusual ability, the Jester's Vise. This was Rubia's deduction.

—Returning safely from Zohar, Kamito's team was greeted by the fervent cheering of Mordis' refugees. All over the streets, praises for the Demon King and his princess maidens could be heard. A massive bonfire was lit on the plaza.

"...What a pain. Do I have to make another speech?"

At the command center of the Demon's Fist, where Rubia was present—

Kamito sighed in the middle of his report.

"Indeed. The refugees place their hopes in the Demon King."

Rubia said.

"Yeah, I know that..."

As the hierarch of the Theocracy, Sjora had unbelievably used a strategic-class spirit and tried to sacrifice her people. What kind of future lay in store for the Theocracy? Whether the refugees of Mordis or the residents of Zohar, everyone must feel quite unsettled.

"If only we could locate Saladia Kahn at least."

"A fair point. Currently, my subordinates are conducting a search."

The Theocracy's second princess, Saladia Kahn, was nowhere to be found in Zohar. Reportedly, just before Leviathan activated, someone had brought her out of prison, then went missing. Saladia was a trained elementalist and could not have weakened and died in such short time... Supposing she had taken the chance to escape during the turmoil, but if that were the case, it was quite baffling why she had not showed up in front of the rebel army that supported her.

"Since Saladia Kahn's whereabouts are unknown, why not simply become the true Demon King and rule the Theocracy?"

"You must be joking."

"Have you ever seen me make a joke?"

Staring squarely at Kamito, Rubia spoke.

Kamito shrugged and shook his head.

"Making me the true Demon King? I'll pass."

Picking up the Demon King's mask, Kamito turned around and walked out of Rubia's room.

In the passage outside, Claire and the others were waiting for him, dressed as the Demon King's concubines.

"Kamito, time to go..."

"Everyone is waiting."

"Yeah..."

Putting on the skull mask, Kamito draped the blood-colored cloak over himself.

The Theocracy had been liberated and successfully obtained the Dragon King's protection.

This news would soon shake the All Nations Conference at the Ordesian Empire.

...By the way, something bothered Kamito. It was Sjora Kahn's last moments.

—The revival of the true Demon King. What on earth did that mean?

Feeling a premonition of war and turmoil, Kamito the impostor Demon King made his appearance on the balcony.

Afterword

In other words, use my body as you please —

And so, thank you for your patience, everyone. I hereby present the 16th installment of *Seirei Tsukai no Blade Dance*, "The Demon King Returns in Triumph"!

First of all, let me express my utmost apologies for the delay in publication time. Due to various production issues being resolved now, I'd like to release new volumes more regularly this year, so please forgive me.

So, in this volume, Ren Ashdoll and Restia's past relationship has become slightly clearer. In addition, I've inserted plenty of subtle foreshadowing.

The series is reaching an end, so what comes next is tying up loose ends in plot and foreshadowing. It looks I'll be able to end the story without issue by following the initial plan to make the series as long as possible. This is all thanks to your support, dear readers.

Next comes the usual acknowledgements. Thank you to Nimura-sensei for the beautiful illustrations. Spirit mille-feuille and the girls are extremely cute, but Kamito's Overlord-like appearance in the color illustration is the best. By the way, on the shoulder of the Overlord-like Kamito is Simorgh under a coat of metallic paint.

Next there is Hyouju Issei-sensei who is in charge of the manga version. Thank you for adapting the original work into a high-quality manga. As a manga, the quality is extremely high, with a very rich presentation. As a reader myself, I look forward to every month's release greatly. Est's galian

sword design and others are awesome. I hope the manga version's final tankouban volume will be on sale in March!

Editor, I've caused so much trouble for you again...!

Finally, I am extremely thankful to all of you, dear readers who had supported me since the beginning. I always print out the comments in the surveys and read them over and over again. Also, to everyone who wrote letters to me, I'm sorry for replying late in recently times. The support and encouragement from everyone fills me with delight. By the way, in the popularity poll of Volume 15, Restia was first, Leonora was 2nd. Leonora-san so powerful...!

Due to limits on page count, I'll do a status update next. Since my hobby is simulation-type board games, so on a whim, I created a doujin board game, called "Draft Sengoku Daimyo", a battle formations game with a Sengoku Era theme. Here on, I'd like to continue participating in the creation of doujin games.

Also, I recently fell in love with improvised rap. When watching late-night TV, the people who come on stage are like language magicians, it feels very deep to me, so I bought many DVDs of rap battling contests to study, yo!

As for foreign TV dramas, every season of "Game of Thrones" fills me with anticipation. I really enjoy the original novels, but the television series is great too. The budget is astounding. This is definitely a must-see masterpiece.

As for smartphone games, I'm playing "Chain Chronicle" and "Shadowverse." The deck I use is Underworld Royal. Although the win rate isn't very high, I'm very happy when using Underworld to decide matches...

That's all, a status update without any focus. I am alive and well, just so you know!

—So, in the next volume, that "Demon King" from a thousand years ago and a certain someone with an intimate past with Est might be making their appearance in Volume 17, "The Sacred Maiden Arrives." See you again then! (There might be a short story collection before that.)

Shimizu Yuu, January 2017

Illustrator's Afterword

Again, I barely made the deadline this time.

Sorry for making trouble for everyone...

Nimura

今回もギリギリ
でした。

ゴメンサイ...

仁村

ひゃー

